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Texas Woman's University (TWU), USA

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The International Academic Forum, Japan

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IAFOR Journal of Education: Language Learning in Education

Volume 10 – Issue 1 – 2022

Edited by Melinda Cowart
Texas Woman's University (TWU), USA

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Foreword

Dear Readers,

Welcome to this issue of the *Language Learning in Education* edition of *The IAFOR Journal of Education*.

In Dr Cowart's editor's introduction to this issue, she references the importance of language and language learning as a tool of unity in a world afflicted by division. As teachers, and as students of language ourselves we are reminded of the importance of language as a tool and as a mediator, and as a source of great power, that can both empower, and humble. One of the great pleasures in reading these papers from so many different nations is the way in which their subjects give so many new and instructive comparative and contrastive perspectives.

While so much in the local context might be particular, what comes through in so many of the papers is the sense to which, as teachers, we share the same challenges. With insights from Morocco, Thailand, UK, Ukraine, Japan, Malta, Norway, Malaysia, and Turkey, this edition is truly international, and the stronger for it.

I would like to thank and congratulate the editor, Dr Melinda, and her team of readers for their work bringing this to publication, as well as the published authors. I would also like to thank *The IAFOR Journal of Education* Executive Editor, Dr Yvonne Masters, and the Publications team of Mr Nick Potts and Ms Ruth Mund for their work behind the scenes.

Happy Reading!

Joseph Haldane
Editor-in-Chief
IAFOR Journal of Education

Editorial Advice

Preparing a submission to the *IAFOR Journal of Education* is more than writing about your research study: it involves paying careful attention to our submission requirements. Different journals have different requirements in terms of format, structure and referencing style, among other things. There are also some common expectations between all journals such as the use of good academic language and lack of plagiarism. To assist you in reaching the review stage for this or any other peer-reviewed journal, we provide the following advice which you should check carefully and ensure that you adhere to.

1. Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a practice that is not acceptable in any journal. Avoiding plagiarism is the cardinal rule of academic integrity because plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, is presenting someone else's work as your own. The *IAFOR Journal of Education* immediately rejects any submission with evidence of plagiarism.

There are three common forms of plagiarism, none of which are acceptable:

1. **Plagiarism with no referencing.** This is copying the words from another source (article, book, website, etc.) without any form of referencing.
2. **Plagiarism with incorrect referencing.** This involves using the words from another source and only putting the name of the author and/or date as a reference. Whilst not as grave as the plagiarism just mentioned, it is still not acceptable academic practice. Direct quoting requires quotation marks and a page number in the reference. This is best avoided by paraphrasing rather than copying.
3. **Self-plagiarism.** It is not acceptable academic practice to use material that you have already had published (which includes in conference proceedings) in a new submission. You should not use your previously published words and you should not submit about the same data unless it is used in a completely new way.

2. Meeting the Journal Aims and Scope

Different journals have different aims and scope, and papers submitted should fit the specific journal. A "scattergun" approach (where you submit anywhere in the hope of being published) is not sound practice. Like in darts, your article needs to hit the journal's "bullseye", it needs to fit within the journal's interest area. For example, a submission that is about building bridges, will not be acceptable in a journal dedicated to education. Ensure that your paper is clearly about education.

3. Follow the Author Guidelines

Most journals will supply a template to be followed for formatting your paper. Often, there will also be a list of style requirements on the website (font, word length, title length, page layout, and referencing style, among other things). There may also be suggestions about the preferred structure of the paper. For the *IAFOR Journal of Education* these can all be found here: <https://iafor.org/journal/iafor-journal-of-education/author-guidelines/>

4. Use Academic Language

The *IAFOR Journal of Education* only accepts papers written in correct and fluent English at a high academic standard. Any use of another language (whether in the paper or the reference list) requires the inclusion of an English translation.

The style of expression must serve to articulate the complex ideas and concepts being presented, conveying explicit, coherent, unambiguous meaning to scholarly readers. Moreover, manuscripts must have a formal tone and quality, employing third-person rather than first-person standpoint (when feasible), placing emphasis on the research and not on unsubstantiated subjective impressions.

Contributors whose command of English is not at the level outlined above are responsible for having their manuscript corrected by a native-level, English-speaking academic prior to submitting their paper for publication.

5. Literature Reviews

Any paper should have reference to the corpus of **scholarly** literature on the topic. A review of the literature should:

- Predominantly be about contemporary literature (the last 5 years) unless you are discussing a seminal piece of work.
- Make explicit international connections for relevant ideas.
- Analyse published papers in the related field rather than describe them.
- Outline the gaps in the literature.
- Highlight your contribution to the field.

Referencing

Referencing is the main way to avoid allegations of plagiarism. The *IAFOR Journal of Education* uses the APA referencing style for both in-text citations and the reference list. If you are unsure of the correct use of APA please use the Purdue Online Writing Lab (Purdue OWL), – <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> – which has excellent examples of all forms of APA referencing. Please note APA is used for referencing not for the general format of the paper. Your reference list should be alphabetical by author surname and include DOIs whenever possible.

This short guide to getting published should assist you to move beyond the first editorial review. Failure to follow the guidelines will result in your paper being immediately rejected.

Good luck in your publishing endeavours,

Dr Yvonne Masters
Executive Editor, *IAFOR Journal of Education*

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From the Editor

Greetings readers! Welcome to the *IAFOR Journal of Education: Volume 10 – Issue 1 – Language Learning in Education*.

Since the last issue of the *IAFOR Journal of Education: Language Learning in Education*, much continues to change for most of the world. As the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic diminishes its onslaught in some areas, it becomes more prevalent in other countries. Individuals from every country have witnessed the damage and loss inflicted by the same worldwide crisis. The return to a more normal way of life that was hoped for by so many remains beyond their grasp. Employment has been difficult at times, causing people to move to an area where jobs were more readily available. The nature of work persists in evolving as many remain at home to accomplish work tasks. The educational world has attempted to cope with flexibility when learning must return to an online format because of sudden and dramatic outbreaks of the virus or one of the new variants. What has not changed is the need for learning a second language, often in a new country and frequently with unfamiliar cultural practices. With the onset of the virus, many nations experienced upheaval and political unrest. Such turmoil has led to the movement of millions of people to safer places in order to survive. The United Nations Secretary General recently noted that extreme weather disasters and armed conflict are colliding, compelling people to escape more than once to find security, shelter, safe haven, and food. Inherent in the move is the need to successfully learn a new target language.

Despite what drives people apart or into isolation or to be separate, what brings the authors of these articles together is the desire to improve the second language teaching and language development of their students. From so many diverse countries in the world, these authors who may have never spoken with one another have conducted research studies all with the intent of improving the education of second language learners. It is as though the language of linguistics, second language acquisition, and of improved pedagogy to teach language becomes the common language of those who are engaged in that pursuit.

Multilingualism, second language acquisition, and second language learning continue to take center stage in every nation. The movement of peoples from country to country has increased. The number of second language learners throughout the world increases continuously, reminding educators, scholars, and researchers that investigating the multifaceted processes of second language acquisition and language learning in addition to researching promising new methods, materials and trends is essential to the improvement of second language teaching and learning. Motivation, appropriate teacher feedback, low affective filters, best procedures for developing speaking and listening skills, the development of vocabulary and equal access to learning are central to the second language acquisition dialogue. The persistent question concerns how to improve second language instruction to enhance and appropriately facilitate second language acquisition. Furthermore, discovering what indicates best practice among those who teach language learners of any age requires educators to look ahead for innovative initiatives while simultaneously continuing to use strategies and methods that are research proven. These precise topics are addressed in the variety of articles provided by the diverse group of authors who contribute their research and scholarship to this issue of the *IAFOR Journal of Education: Language Learning in Education*. The reader will gain knowledge of several issues affecting language learning in a wide assortment of nations and will find that similar discussions emerge in schools and second language classrooms transnationally.

Article 1

In the first article, Jean-Marc Dewaele and Pearl P. Y. Leung, in their article, “The Effect of Proficiency on “Non-Native” EFL Teachers’ Feelings and Self-Reported Behaviours”, investigate whether the level of proficiency of teachers who teach a non-native language such as English influences their attitudes, motivation, well-being or choice of classroom practices. The quantitative study involved 376 English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers from around the world who had learned English as a foreign language. The researchers sought to explore the relationship of their English language proficiency and their sense of self-efficacy. The findings showed many correlations between language proficiency and confident teaching in the EFL classroom. This study establishes important considerations regarding the necessary proficiency of language teachers and their ongoing language development in support of that competence.

Article 2

May Olaug Hoverak, Gerd Martina Langeland, Agnete Løvik, Sigrunn Askland, Paweł Scheffler, and Aleksandra Wach, authors of “Systematic Work with Speaking Skills and Motivation in Second language Classes”, explore strategies that may be useful in limiting the damaging effects of foreign language anxiety through the reclaiming of agency in improving one’s own educational setting and achievement. Their participants were teenagers and adult immigrants, and the research study was conducted in a variety of language learning situations that included English classes in Norway and Poland and Spanish classes in Norway. Upon completion of their intervention, the results were promising. As the foreign language anxiety lessened during the study, motivation typically increased. The participants reported that they sensed a more supportive learning environment.

Article 3

In “A Corpus-Based Comparison of Inclusiveness in L2 Reading Materials for Refugee Children”, Meliha R. Simsek explores how newly arrived refugee children in Turkey may find themselves represented in school reading materials. A multimethod study was conducted for the purpose of determining the degree of inclusiveness of L2 reading materials used for refugee education in Turkey and New Zealand. The study looked specifically at diversity issues such as different proficiency levels, gender identities and cultural backgrounds. A significant aspect of the study was a comparison of English as a second language (ESL) and Turkish as a second language (TSL) materials. The results of the study should lead to essential improvements and policies in refugee education.

Article 4

Jacqueline Żammit, author of, “Sociocultural Issues Experienced by Adults Learning Maltese as a Second Language”, looks at sociocultural problems encountered by Maltese as a second language (ML2) students and to what degree the sociocultural issues significantly impact ML2 learners. The study included 35 adult ML2 learners from a variety of language backgrounds, including Semitic, Romance, Germanic, Slavic, Indo-European, Indo-Aryan, and Indo-Iranian. Each participant had experienced at least one of the following sociocultural challenges: culture shock, frustrating experiences trying to communicate in the new second language, memories that were not as sharp as they had been in younger years, and unfamiliar teaching methods. Among other important considerations, the findings highlight a significant aspect of second language acquisition for older persons – that of diminishing memories. The outcomes of the research offer insights that may inform the revision of diverse programs with similar issues.

Article 5

John Duplice, author of, “The GoldList Notebook Method: A Study on L2 Vocabulary Learning”, underscores the certain importance of intentional and effective vocabulary development among second language learners. His study looked at collected data from 74 university students in Japan studying English vocabulary with the GoldList Notebook Method, which incorporates spaced learning and retrieval practice. The study was conducted over a nine-week period and consisted of both quantitative and qualitative research. The findings showed efficacy in using the method and highlighted particular merit to spaced learning over two-week intervals. The method is found to be especially useful with adult learners.

Article 6

In “Facebook as a Flexible Ubiquitous Learning Space for Developing Speaking Skills”, Svitlana Mykytiuk, Olena Lysytska, Tetiana Melnikova, and Serhii Mykytiuk, also investigate how to improve second language learners’ speaking skills. Their quasi-experimental study examined the effectiveness of the integration of Facebook as a flexible pervasive learning space into the educational process for speaking skills development of undergraduate students learning English as a second language. The results revealed higher achievement scores of the experimental group in comparison to the control group in terms of expanding vocabulary, increasing English grammar literacy, developing interactive skills, discourse management, and pronunciation.

Article 7

Eleni Meletiadou, author of “The Utilisation of Peer-Assisted Learning/Mentoring and Translanguaging in Higher Education” implemented a study that researched the impact of peer assisted learning/mentoring or PALM activities and translanguaging on the oral fluency of 80 multilingual students who were required to prepare oral presentations in the new target language. The results point to the probability that the innovative activities created a psychologically safe place in which students could achieve academic improvement. The findings accentuate the connection between emotion and cognition, underscoring the role of a low affective filter in increasing classroom involvement.

Article 8

In, “Factors Obstructing English Teaching Effectiveness: Teacher Voices from Thailand’s Deep South”, Muhammadafeefee Assalihee and Yusop Boonsuk investigated factors leading to the ineffectiveness of English language teaching (ELT) in the rural settings of the three southern border provinces in Thailand where both teachers and learners have experienced ongoing political unrest, eruptions of violence, fears, and insecurity. The researchers hoped to introduce a new lens of contextualized English instructions for learners in schools located in Southernmost Thailand, where learners live amid linguistic and cultural diversity. The results revealed that five primary factors were leading to the deterioration of English language learning efficiency.

Article 9

Nur Izzah binti Osman and Siti Nazleen binti Abdul Rabu, authors of “Mobile Learning for Malay Language among Foreign Workers: A Preliminary Study” conducted a study to understand the learning process and language acquisition of Communicative Malay Language (CML) among foreign workers in Malaysia. The researchers also wanted to explore potential utilizations of mobile applications in assisting CML learning among foreign workers. The analysis of the collected data for this qualitative study revealed that most of the respondents

were not adequately supplied with general knowledge about the country. However, and reported that they considered the mobile application to be an effective tool in learning L2 and developing listening skills in the new target language.

Article 10

In “Online Assessment in the Digital Era: Moroccan EFL University Students’ Experiences, Perceptions and Challenges” Nourreddine Menyani, Ahlame Boumehdi, and Oumaima El Jaadi sought to explore students’ experience with online emergency learning as well as online evaluation. The findings of this research revealed that the students experienced technical issues while submitting their exams. They expressed their disappointment with the lack of feedback provided by their professors. The participants commented that they experienced frequent worry about academic honesty. This has caused them to lose interest in their studies and to possess doubts about reliving the online assessment experience.

Happy reading!

Melinda Cowart

Texas Woman’s University, USA

Editor, *IAFOR Journal of Education: Language Learning in Education*

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Notes on Contributors

Article 1:

The Effect of Proficiency on “Non-Native” EFL Teachers’ Feelings and Self-Reported Behaviours

Dr Jean-Marc Dewaele is Professor of Applied Linguistics and Multilingualism at Birkbeck, University of London. He has authored and edited 9 books, published over 320 papers and chapters on individual differences in psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, psychological and emotional variables in Second Language Acquisition and Multilingualism. He is former president of the International Association of Multilingualism and the European Second Language Association, and he is General Editor of the Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development. He won the Equality and Diversity Research Award from the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2013), the Robert Gardner Award for Excellence in Second Language and Bilingualism Research from the International Association of Language and Social Psychology (2016) and the Distinguished Scholar Award from the European Second Language Association (2022).

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Pearl Pui Yin Leung obtained her MA in Applied Linguistics at University College London and she is currently finishing her PhD in Applied Linguistics at Birkbeck, University of London. Her dissertation is entitled “Inner speech development during acculturation: A longitudinal explanatory sequential methods study on Chinese university students in the UK”. She co-authored a paper with Jean-Marc Dewaele on the Complementarity Principle in inner speech that appeared in the *International Journal of Multilingualism* in 2021.

Article 2:

Systematic Work with Speaking Skills and Motivation in Second Language Classes

Dr May Olaug Horverak has a PhD in English linguistics and didactics and works as a headmaster at Birkenes Learning Centre. She is also leader of the project SAMM in adult learning and primary and lower secondary school. Her research interests are applied linguistics, motivation and health promotion.

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Agnete Løvik has an MA in English linguistics and works as a teacher at Kvadraturen upper secondary school. Her research interests are English linguistics and didactics.

Dr Sigrunn Askland has a PhD in linguistics and didactics and works as a teacher at Arendal upper secondary school. Her research interests are applied linguistics in L1, L2 and L3.

Paweł Scheffler is a lecturer and researcher in the Faculty of English at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań. His research interests are second language acquisition, classroom foreign language instruction, and modern English grammar.

Aleksandra Wach is university professor at the Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań. Her main research interests include teaching L2 grammar, the role of the native language in L2 learning and teaching, and computer-assisted language learning.

Article 3:**A Corpus-Based Comparison of Inclusiveness in L2 Reading Materials for Refugee Children**

Dr Meliha R. Simsek is currently an associate professor of TEFL at the University of Health Sciences (Istanbul, Turkey). She has been teaching English to a multinational group of medical students at the preparatory division since 2017. She got her BA (2004), MA (2006) and PhD (2009) in ELT from Dokuz Eylul University (Izmir). She has since served as an English instructor at the School of Foreign Languages (Dokuz Eylul University), and as a teacher educator at the Faculty of Education in Middle East Technical University (Ankara), and therefore been working with both EFL learners and teacher candidates for the last eighteen years. Her research interests include teacher education, applied linguistics, ELT methodology, and materials evaluation and development.

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Article 4:**Sociocultural Issues Experienced by Adults Learning Maltese as a Second Language**

Dr Jacqueline Żammit is a lecturer in the Pedagogy of Maltese, with a specialization in the teaching of Maltese as a Foreign Language within the Department of Languages and Humanities, Faculty of Education at the University of Malta. She holds a First-Class BEd (Hons) Degree in Maltese and Early and Middle Years, a MA Degree with Distinction in Maltese Linguistics, and a PhD from the University of Malta. Her areas of interest comprise adult education, multiculturalism, interculturalism, computer-assisted language learning, second language acquisition, cross-cultural communication, plurilingualism, applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, artificial intelligence, and, in particular, the teaching and learning of Maltese as a second language. Jacqueline has over twenty years of pedagogic insights experience working with Primary, Secondary and Tertiary schools to teach Maltese as a first and foreign language and Spanish as a foreign language.

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Article 5:**The GoldList Notebook Method: A Study on L2 Vocabulary Learning**

John Duplice has been teaching English to English language learners for more than twenty years in both university and corporate settings in Japan and the United States. He is currently a lecturer of English in the Center for Language Education & Research at Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan. He holds an MEd in curriculum & instruction from the University of Nebraska and an MA in teaching writing from Johns Hopkins University. At present, John is a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics at the University of Birmingham studying the efficacy of desirable difficulties on second language learners.

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Article 6:**Facebook as a Flexible Ubiquitous Learning Space for Developing Speaking Skills**

Dr Svitlana Mykytiuk has a PhD in Philology and is Associate Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages №1, Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, Kharkiv, Ukraine. Her research interests are innovative methods of teaching foreign languages, technology assisted learning and comparative study of literature.

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Dr Olena Lysytska has a PhD in Philology and is Associate Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages №1, Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, Kharkiv, Ukraine. Her research interests are Slavic languages, English, World Literature, intercultural communication, innovative methodology of teaching foreign languages, English for special purposes.

Dr Tetiana Melnikova has a PhD in Philology and is Associate Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages №1, Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, Kharkiv, Ukraine. Tetiana Melnikova's research interests are methods of teaching foreign languages, technology-enhanced language learning, and literature studies.

Dr Serhii Mykytiuk is a Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, PhD in Psychology, at the Department of Psychology and Pedagogical Anthropology, H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University, Ukraine. Serhii Mykytiuk's research interests are educational psychology, developmental psychology, social psychology, and interactive teaching methods.

Article 7:**The Utilisation of Peer-Assisted Learning/Mentoring and Translanguaging in Higher Education**

Dr Eleni Meletiadou is a Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Higher Education at London Metropolitan University Guildhall School of Business and Law. She is an enthusiastic peer learning, writing, and assessment scholar and an award-winning researcher and adviser with over 20 years of international experience. She is the Chair of the European Association for Educational Assessment (AEA-Europe) Inclusive Assessment SIG and an Expert Member of the European Association for Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA). She is the Conference Track Chair of the British Academy of Management Knowledge & Learning SIG and the European Academy of Management (EURAM) Doctoral Accelerator Mentor.

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Article 8:**Factors Obstructing English Teaching Effectiveness: Teacher Voices from Thailand's Deep South**

Dr Muhammadafeefee Assalihee is a lecturer at the Department of Islamic Studies of Prince of Songkla University at Pattani Campus, Pattani, Thailand.

Dr Yusop Boonsuk is affiliated with the English Section of Prince of Songkla University at Pattani Campus, Pattani, Thailand. He obtained a PhD in Applied Linguistics (English Language Teaching) from Southampton University, UK. His current research interests include Global Englishes (GEs), World Englishes (WEs), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), English as an International Language (EIL), Intercultural and Transcultural Communication, Intercultural Awareness, English Language Teaching (ELT), English Medium Instruction (EMI), and English Language Beliefs, Attitudes, and Identity.

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Article 9:**Mobile Learning for Malay Language among Foreign Workers: A Preliminary Study**

Dr Siti Nazleen Abdul Rabu is currently a senior lecturer at the Centre for Instructional Technology and Multimedia (CITM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Penang, Malaysia. Her research interests include instructional strategies in online learning, specifically looking into online learning discourse analysis, online scaffolding, computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL), including the application of data mining and learning analytics in online learning. She also loves exploring the potential of new approaches to teaching and learning in the 21st century, such as flipping learning, game-based learning, gamification, utilization of QR codes in education and Google infused classrooms.

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Nur Izzah Osman is currently a PhD candidate at the Centre for Instructional Technology and Multimedia (CITM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Penang, Malaysia. She is also a Malay Language as a Foreign Language educator based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She has been teaching Malay Language as a second or foreign language to students from all over world and all ages for over a decade and loves exploring ever-evolving approaches to language teaching and learning. Her research interests include instructional technology, especially the integration of technology in language learning, mobile-assisted language learning, computer-assisted language learning and online learning.

Article 10:**Online Assessment in the Digital Era: Moroccan EFL University Students' Experiences, Perceptions and Challenges**

Dr Nourreddine Menyani is an assistant professor at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS), Moulay Ismail University, Meknès, Morocco. He earned a PhD in Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Ibn Tofail University in Kénitra, Morocco. He is also a member in several Research groups, namely "Sciences of Language, Art, Literature, Education and Culture" at the ENS, "Applied Linguistics and the

Teaching of Languages” Moulay Ismail University, and “Language and Society”, Ibn Tofail University. He authored and co-authored several research papers. His research interests include Applied Linguistics, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Information Communication Technology, Pedagogy, Foreign Language Teaching and Learning and Assessment.

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The Effect of Proficiency on “Non-Native” EFL Teachers’ Feelings and Self-Reported Behaviours

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Pearl P. Y. Leung
Birkbeck, University of London, United Kingdom

Abstract

The current study addresses the question whether the level of proficiency of teachers who teach a “non-native” language, English, affects their attitudes, motivation, well-being and self-reported classroom practices. This quantitative study is based on a cross-sectional research design in order to investigate the relationship between actual English proficiency of 376 English Foreign Language teachers from around the world who had English as a Foreign Language and feelings and self-reported behaviours. Statistical analyses showed that more proficient teachers scored higher on the dimensions “Classroom practice” and “Attitudes toward students and institution”. They were also more motivated and happier. Intermediate (B1-B2) teachers scored significantly lower on these measures than EFL educators with Advanced proficiency (C1-C2). No significant differences emerged between teachers at Lower advanced (C1) and Upper advanced levels (C2). An argument is made that all dependent and independent variables are connected, highly dynamic and interacting directly and indirectly, which means that causality is multi-directional. The implication is that educational authorities should organise regular in-service training to maintain and boost teachers’ proficiency because investing in teachers’ linguistic skills represents a long-term investment in their emotional well-being and will ultimately benefit their students.

Keywords: attitudes, classroom practices, EFL teaching, foreign language users, motivation, proficiency, well-being

Erratum: Due to a production error, this manuscript was reuploaded on June 8, 2022, with a correction made to the article title and the second sentence of Abstract.

Elaine Horwitz, a pioneer of teacher training and foreign language anxiety research, listed the following characteristics of good “non-native” language teachers: “good humour, creativity, understanding of young people, love of the language and culture, high language proficiency, a solid background in methodology and a flexible teaching style” (1996, p. 371). The paper may be 26 years old but the notion of what makes a good “non-native” teacher has not changed. She notes that too many “non-native” teachers think that only fluency matters. She admits that it would be great for “non-native” teachers to speak the foreign language (FL) flawlessly but acknowledges that this is rather rare. Teachers who feel unable to reach this level of idealized proficiency may suffer from debilitating anxiety, even if they did actually achieve very high levels of proficiency in the FL. Horwitz adds that “non-native” teachers should be proud of their achievement. She concludes that at an institutional level, it is crucial to organise training for pre-service and in-service “non-native” teachers to help them maintain and improve their proficiency in the FL.

One aspect that has changed since 1996 is the use of the term “non-native” which is increasingly seen as being toxic. Swan, Aboshiha and Holliday (2015) talked about the “tyranny of native-speakerism” in the worldwide English language teaching profession. Dewaele, Bak and Ortega (2021) argued that the idea that FL learners should attain some mythical unattainable “native” norm is unrealistic and discriminatory. In order to avoid the use of these loaded terms, Dewaele (2018a) introduced the terms “L1 user” and “LX user”. “LX” refers to any language acquired after the age of three. Contrary to ‘native’ and “non-native” speaker, the labels “L1/LX” do not imply any level of proficiency. LX users may have varying levels of proficiency in their LX, from minimal to maximal but crucially they are seen as legitimate users of the LX. The new L1/LX dichotomy allows researchers to avoid the deficit view that is inherent in the term “non-native” speaker.

What Horwitz (1996) did not mention was exactly how proficient LX teachers should be to qualify as “good” teachers. Proficiency requirements differ depending on the country, the type of institution, the age and level of the students. Requirements can also be vague, namely a degree in the FL without any specific mention of proficiency level. In the United Kingdom, graduate students and student teachers who wish to teach a language that is not their L1 are required to have at least C1 level for entry at the Institute of Education, University College London¹, a world-leading provider of teacher training for Early Years, Primary and Secondary education. The C1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2020) refers to advanced, proficient users. This same level (C1-C2) is required in other institutions that offer training courses for teachers for whom English is a FL, such as Trinity College London. The present paper will investigate whether English Foreign language (EFL) teachers who have only a B1 or B2 level in English differ from their more advanced (C1 and C2) colleagues in terms of self-reported practices, emotions, attitudes and motivation. In other words, is the C1 level really the proficiency threshold for being a “good” teacher?

¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/applying-international-student>

Research Questions

The present study aims to address the following research questions:

1. Is the English LX proficiency of EFL teachers linked to their attitudes toward their students and institution, and their self-reported classroom practices?
2. Is the English LX proficiency of EFL teachers linked to their motivation?
3. Is the English LX proficiency of EFL teachers linked to their well-being?

Literature Review

Non-Native Speakers

Llurda (2009) pointed out that at the start of the new millennium researchers started to agree that “non-native” speakers may be just as good teachers as “native speaker” teachers but that did not seem to dent the perceived superiority of the “native speaker teacher” in the EFL profession.

A few years earlier, Mahboob (2004) had already argued that the discrimination against “non-native” teachers was linked to programme administrators who mistakenly believed that students did not want them and thus avoided hiring them. Holliday (2005) described “native-speakerism” in the EFL profession as the mistaken belief that that Western “native speakers” are the best models and teachers of English. He attributed the deep and sustained prejudice against “non-native” teachers as the result of racism and cultural prejudice (Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009). In later work, Holliday (2015) described “native-speakerism” as a “widespread cultural disbelief (...) in the cultural contribution of teachers who have been labelled ‘non-native speakers’” (p. 11). Kumaravadivelu (2016) claimed that the inequity against “non-native” teachers in EFL teaching is continuing and these people are victims of a hegemonic power structure.

An indication that teachers themselves do no longer share the view that “native speaker” teachers are superior emerged from Dewaele, Mercer, Talbot and von Blanckenburg (2020). The researchers developed a research design to measure implicit bias against “non-native” EFL teachers in judgements of teaching competence. Three hundred Austrian and German pre-service EFL teachers watched an identical short video of a teacher in front of an EFL classroom and used Likert scales to rate her performance on four dimensions (language, teaching, assessment, communication) as well as in item on their willingness to have this person as their English teacher. Half of the participants were told that the teacher was a “native speaker” teacher, the other half that she was a “non-native speaker” teacher. The differences between both conditions were found to be non-significant. The strongest predictor of willingness to have that teacher was her teaching skill. In other words, there was no bias against “non-native speaker” EFL teachers. Of course, parents, students and school management may still hold a bias against “non-native” teachers.

The Relationship between Teachers’ Proficiency and Teaching Ability

Shin (2008) pointed out that “Having an excellent command of the target language is indeed one of the most important characteristics of outstanding foreign language teachers” (p. 59). FL teachers’ proficiency has direct consequences on what takes place in the classroom as teachers with limited proficiency in the target language might struggle to access language resources,

including authentic material, and are more likely to stick to the textbook (Farrell & J. C. Richards, 2007). They also risk providing incorrect responses to students and they may struggle to notice learner language errors. Their linguistic insecurity may be particularly acute in oral interactions which may push them to tighten their grip over the class. Researchers have also used self-reports and test results compiled by institutions using their own instruments (Digap, 2016). Other measurements of proficiency rely on observers' judgments of direct classroom observation.

Expressing their surprise at the scarcity of research in this area, Moussu and Llorca (2008) issued the following call: "language proficiency has never been used as an independent variable in order to observe and describe differences among NNS teachers. Such an analysis might greatly contribute to a greater understanding of the role of the teacher's language proficiency in language teaching" (p. 339). More researchers have focused on this topic since then but their epistemological and methodological choices have made generalizations difficult. A positive development is that researchers have started arguing for a more nuanced view of language teachers' proficiency and have combatted the deficit view surrounding LX teachers. Kamhi-Stein (2009) argued that language proficiency is only part of the teacher professional profile, and teacher training programmes should focus on issues surrounding language proficiency regardless of whether the teachers were L1 users or LX teachers. Richards, Conway, Roskvist and Harvey (2013), for example, pointed out that linguistic proficiency is only one part of subject knowledge, among other subsets of skills that for foreign language teachers need to master. Other skills include knowledge of the curriculum, of the syllabus, of pedagogical principles, of the target language culture and of the theory of second language acquisition. The authors carried out a case study of seven New Zealand teachers of foreign languages and found that teachers with low level of target language proficiency were able carry out some aspects of effective language teaching but they struggled when having to provide meaningful explanations, rich language input and an ability to improvise. As such, they were more suited for beginners' classes.

Faez and Karas (2017) reviewed the research on the link between teacher proficiency and teaching ability. The authors found a relatively weak positive correlation between teacher' language proficiency and their confidence in their classroom abilities in 10 out of 11 studies. However, only one study used an actual language proficiency test, all others used self-reported proficiency measures in the four skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing). Following the same avenue, Faez, Karas and Uchihara (2021) carried out a meta-analysis of 19 studies to investigate the relationship between language proficiency and teaching ability of English LX teachers. The authors found a moderate positive relationship between language proficiency and teaching self-efficacy.

The Concept of Proficiency

Proficiency is not a static concept, it is merely a snapshot at one moment in time of a process started many years earlier when the teacher was still a student, and it likely to develop further in life. Some of these differences are learner-internal (micro-level), others are learner-external at a meso-level (classroom, school, education system) or even at a macro-level) (historical, political, ideological context). Variables at these different levels interact, which means that the effect of any single variable can be different because of the many interactions. High proficiency is more likely to emerge when micro-, meso- and macro-levels are aligned, namely if a learner has all the right personal attributes to learn a target language, with good teaching and plenty of rich input, in an environment that values the target language. Imperfect alignment of the various

levels is not necessarily an obstacle if the learner is willing to make an effort and if alternative paths are available to improve mastery of the target language. These various levels continue to play a role when LX learners become LX teachers. There will inevitably be variation in the extent to which new teachers will be willing and able to maintain and develop their proficiency. It is likely that if they feel respected and valued in their institution, they may decide to further improve their proficiency.

The concept of proficiency is the bedrock of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) developed by the Council of Europe. Six levels of language proficiency are distinguished: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, which can be regrouped into three broad levels: Basic User, Independent User and Proficient User. Measurement happens through “can-do” descriptors for listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>).

Foreign Language Education policy is very much influenced by the CEFR which serves as a benchmark for language education around the world and influences educational policies (see for example, Rehner, Popovitch & Lasan, 2021). It allows transparency in comparing expected progress and outcomes of FL learning and it allows officials to set thresholds for both learners and teachers. For example, Thai secondary school English teachers are expected to have reached B2 level, yet a CEFR-referenced online placement test organised by the ministry of education in 2015 revealed that 94% had failed to reach this level and that A2 level (basic user) was much more common than expected (Franz & Teo, 2018).

Freeman, Katz, Gomez and Burns (2015) have called for a reconceptualization of teacher language proficiency, taking a language-for-specific-purposes approach, arguing that teacher language proficiency should not be seen as general language proficiency such as probed by the CEFR but rather specific command of classroom English. This debate lies beyond the scope of the present paper.

The Relationship between EFL Teachers’ Classroom Behavior and their Emotional, Motivational and Attitudinal Dimensions

The field has witnessed a rapid growth of interest in the topic of teacher psychology (de Dios Martinez Agudo, 2018; Gkonou, Dewaele & King, 2020; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018). Dewaele and Mercer (2018) developed an online questionnaire to collect self-reports from 513 EFL teachers from around the world who had English as an L1 or as an LX. Four studies have been published on parts of the dataset and the present study is the fifth, focusing on a subgroup of participants in the database, namely the English LX users. The first study was Dewaele and Mercer (2018) that looked at individual differences in self-reported attitudes toward their students. Participants with higher Trait Emotional Intelligence, more experience and higher proficiency were found to have significantly more positive attitudes toward their students. The second study on the same database showed that participants with high levels of Trait Emotional Intelligence scored significantly higher on pedagogical skills, creativity and classroom management. Teachers who had been in the profession for longer also reported significantly better classroom management and pedagogical skills and more creativity in their classrooms (Dewaele, Gkonou & Mercer, 2018). The third study (Dewaele, 2018b) zoomed in on the effect of Global Trait Emotional Intelligence as well as the specific effect of the four factors that constitute this personality trait (sociability, well-being, self-control and emotionality). Sociability and well-being turned out to be most strongly

positively correlated with classroom management and pedagogical skills. A difference was also uncovered between L1 and LX users of English, with Global Trait EI and emotionality being significantly positively linked to the English proficiency of the latter but not to that of the former. The fourth study (Dewaele, 2020) looked for links between dimensions of teacher motivation, dimensions of Trait Emotional Intelligence, teaching experience, status of English, English proficiency, age and gender. Motivation was found to be positively linked with all four factors of Trait Emotional Intelligence. High proficiency in English was linked to stronger motivation. Female teachers were also found to be more highly motivated.

This literature review shows that researchers have found links between teachers' proficiency and various aspects of their teaching ability, confidence and motivation, which are in turn linked to psychological and sociobiographical variables. Considering the Thai ministry's requirement that its secondary English teachers reach a B2 level (Franz & Teo, 2018) and University College London's insistence on C1 as threshold for their graduate students and English LX teachers, the study will investigate whether a difference exists in the self-reported classroom behavior, attitudes toward students and institution, motivation, and well-being of EFL teachers who had English as an LX who scored above or below C1.

Methodology

A combination of convenience and purposive sampling was used to reach potential participants who had to be EFL teachers (Ness Evans & Rooney, 2013). Calls for participation with a link to the anonymous questionnaire were sent out widely through direct communication and through posts on social media including forums of EFL teacher associations in 2016. Participants were invited to forward the call to their EFL colleagues. A total of 513 participants from across the world filled out the questionnaire in English². The present study focusses on a sub-group, namely 376 EFL teachers for whom English was an LX. Participants varied in age, country of residence and language background which strengthens the ecological validity of the data, as local effects are averaged out. Participants completed a short sociobiographical questionnaire before doing a lexical decision task to determine their English proficiency. They then answered the closed questions about their attitudes, motivation and classroom behavior. The research design received ethical approval from the authors' institution.

Participants

A total of 376 participants (295 females, 77 males, 4 preferred not to say) filled out the questionnaire. The largest group were Ukrainians ($n = 37$), Greek ($n = 30$), Azerbaijani ($n = 25$), Argentinian ($n = 14$), Chinese ($n = 14$), and smaller numbers of participants with other nationalities. Most participants were teaching English at university ($n = 197$), others taught in secondary schools ($n = 120$) and primary schools ($n = 59$). Further demographic information of the participants is presented in table 1.

² We assumed that a B1 level of English was sufficient to understand the questionnaire.

Table 1
Demographic Information of Participants

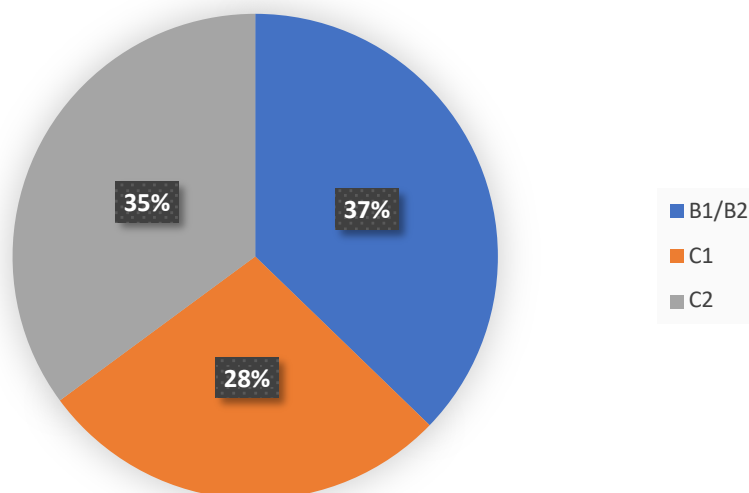
| | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| Age | 19 | 76 | 38.8 | 10.2 |
| Years as a teacher | 0.1 | 50 | 14.2 | 10.1 |
| Number of languages known | 2 | 6 | 3.5 | 1.1 |

Independent Variable

The independent variable was general English proficiency³, based on the 60-item test developed by Lemhöfer and Broersma (2012), which takes 5 minutes to complete. The LexTALE test requires participants to distinguish real English words from English-looking words that do not exist in English, using a YES/NO format. Its scores correlate highly with TOEIC test results, an established test of English proficiency that takes approximately 2½ hours to complete. Thus, even though LexTALE was not designed to capture general English proficiency fully, scholars recognize it as a good indicator for intermediate to (very) high proficiency LX users. Although there has been some debate about the sampling rate of LEXTALE (Masrai, 2022), the test, which has been translated in different languages, is considered to be a sound and effective instrument for measuring vocabulary size, as a proxy for general L2 proficiency (Zhou & Li, 2021). The mean score for LEXTALE among the study participants was 83.5%, with a standard deviation of 12.9%.

Lemhöfer and Broersma (2012) equate scores below 59% on LexTALE as corresponding to the lower independent users and the lower level descriptors of the CEFR (B1 and lower). LexTALE scores between 60% and 80% correspond to Upper independent users (B2), scores between 80% and 90% correspond to Lower advanced (C1) and scores above 90% correspond to Upper advanced (C2). In the present study 140 participants had a score between 60% and 80%. The researchers consequently created a single category of “Independent users” (B1-B2). One hundred and four participants had a score between 80.1% and 90% and were labeled “Lower advanced users” (C1). The 132 participants with scores above 90.1% were labelled “Upper advanced users” (C2), 18 of which scored the maximum 100% (see Figure 1 for the distribution of proficiency level).

³ Given the fact that the authors are not aware of valid and reliable tests that measure the command of classroom English in no more than five minutes, it was necessary to use a test that measures general proficiency instead. We feel that “teacher language proficiency” (cf. Freeman et al., 2015) is not radically different from “general language proficiency” and hence that measuring the latter provides a sufficient reflection of the former. Entering in this debate lies beyond the scope of this paper.

Figure 1*Distribution of Participants According to Proficiency Level***Dependent Variables**

The first cluster of dependent variables include the Likert scale responses to 7 items out of a list of 11 items published in Dewaele (2018b). It contains statements accompanied by 5-point Likert scales ranging from “absolutely not” to “absolutely yes”. The first group of statements reflect teacher emotions, attitudes, classroom practice and skills.

1. I love the English language [*Passion for English*]
2. I have a positive attitude toward the institution in which I teach [*Attitude toward the institution*]
3. I have a positive attitude toward my students [*Attitude toward students*]
4. I enjoy having lively students [*Enjoy lively students*]
5. I use English frequently in class [*Frequency of use*]
6. I see myself as a creative teacher [*Creative teacher*]
7. I frequently allow my students to work independently [*Independent students*]
8. My classes are predictable (i.e. I often stick to a similar class routine). [*Class routine*]
9. I can influence the selection of teaching content and language skills [*Influence on teaching content*]
10. I am a good English teacher in terms of classroom management skills [*Classroom management skills*]
11. I am a good English teacher in terms of pedagogic or didactic skills [*Pedagogic and didactic skills*]

Table 2 presents the range, mean scores and standard deviations for these 11 items.

Table 2*Range, Means and Standard Deviations for the First Cluster of Dependent Variables*

| Variable | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | SD |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|------|-----|
| Love English | 3 | 5 | 4.7 | 0.5 |
| Attitude toward institution | 1 | 5 | 3.9 | 0.9 |
| Attitude toward students | 1 | 5 | 4.4 | 0.8 |
| Enjoy lively students | 3 | 5 | 4.3 | 0.7 |
| Frequency use of English | 1 | 5 | 4.6 | 0.7 |
| Creative teacher | 1 | 5 | 3.8 | 0.8 |
| Allow independent work | 2 | 5 | 3.7 | 0.6 |
| Predictable | 1 | 5 | 3.0 | 0.7 |
| Influence over content and skills | 1 | 5 | 3.7 | 0.8 |
| Classroom management | 1 | 5 | 3.8 | 0.7 |
| Pedagogical skills | 2 | 5 | 3.9 | 0.7 |

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed to identify latent dimensions in the eleven items. Items with a communality below 0.2 suggest were eliminated from the analysis because of their low common variance (Child, 2006). As a result, five items including *passion for English*, *frequency of use*, *independent students*, *class routine*, and *influence on teaching content* were removed from the analysis due to low communality. The communality of the remaining six variables is shown in Table 3.

Table 3*Communalities*

| Item | Initial | Extraction |
|---------------------------------|---------|------------|
| Attitude toward the institution | .209 | .312 |
| Attitude toward students | .276 | .640 |
| Creative teacher | .295 | .389 |
| Enjoy lively students | .168 | .215 |
| Classroom management skills | .379 | .544 |
| Pedagogic and didactic skills | .394 | .604 |

The determinant score of this EFA model is .308, showing an absence of multicollinearity (Yong & Pearce, 2013). The Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is .694, indicating the sample size is just sufficient (Field, 2018). The Bartlett's test for sphericity is significant ($p < .001$), indicating factorability in the data (Yong & Pearce, 2013). Two factors were extracted in the remaining six items using Principal Axis Factoring (Table 4). Analysis of the scree plot shows two factors above the eigenvalue of 1, suggesting two factors in the exploratory factor analysis. The first factor, "*Attitude toward students and the institution*" has a Cronbach's alpha of .610, which indicates sufficient internal reliability (Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2022). The second factor, '*Classroom practice*', has a Cronbach's alpha of .711, which indicates an acceptable internal reliability.

Table 4*Factor Loadings on Attitude toward Students and the Institution, and Classroom Practice*

| Factor | Item | Factor loading | | Cronbach's alpha |
|--|---------------------------------|----------------|------|------------------|
| | | 1 | 2 | |
| Attitude toward students and the institution | Attitude toward the institution | | .556 | .610 |
| | Attitude toward students | | .800 | |
| Classroom practice | Creative teacher | .587 | .372 | .711 |
| | Enjoy lively students | .418 | .313 | |
| | Classroom management skills | .733 | | |
| | Pedagogic and didactic skills | .770 | | |

Extraction method: principal axis factoring; Rotation: Promax with Kaiser normalisation, 2 factors extracted.

Because the variables Attitude toward student and the institution, and classroom practice are not normally distributed ($KS = .19$ and $.12$, $p < .001$ respectively), non-parametric statistics were used, namely Kruskal Wallis analyses.

The second cluster of dependent variables are the scores on teacher motivation dimensions that emerged from the *Work Tasks Motivation Scale for Teachers* which deals with motivation for task completion (Fernet et al., 2008). It assesses “the constructs of intrinsic motivation, identified, introjected, and external regulations, and amotivation toward six work tasks (i.e., class preparation, teaching, evaluation of students, class management, administrative tasks, and complementary tasks)” (p. 274). The items were reformulated in order to focus specifically on the motivation to teach English. This includes 3 items per dimension with 5-point Likert scales. Possible answers ranged from “not especially” (1), “so-so” (2), “quite a lot” (3), “a lot” (4), to “very much” (5).

The first dimension is “intrinsically motivated behaviors” that teachers “are engaged in for the pleasure or the satisfaction derived from performing them” (Fernet et al., 2008, p. 258). One item was: *Because teaching English is pleasant*. The distribution was not normal ($KS = .173$, $p < .0001$). The second dimension is identified regulation, defined as “behavior that individuals choose to perform because it is congruent with their own values and goals” (p. 258). One item was: *Because it is important for me to teach English*. Because the Cronbach alpha value falls below the minimal threshold for internal consistency (Dörnyei, 2010), this dimension was excluded from further analyses. The third dimension is introjected regulation, which “corresponds to the process whereby an external demand becomes an internal representation” (Fernet et al., 2008, p. 258). One item was: *Because if I don't teach, I will feel bad*. The distribution was not normal ($KS = .085$, $p < .0001$). The fourth dimension is external regulation, which “occurs when behaviors are regulated to obtain a reward or to avoid a constraint” (Fernet et al., 2008, p. 258). One item was: *I teach English because I'm paid to do it*. Mean score was 3.46 ($SD = .75$). The distribution was not normal ($KS = .153$, $p < .0001$). Because the Cronbach alpha value was extremely low, this dimension was excluded from further analyses. The fifth and final dimension is amotivation, which “refers to being neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated” (Fernet et al., 2008, p. 258). One item was: *I don't know why because I don't always see the relevance of teaching English*. The distribution was not normal ($KS = .180$, $p < .001$).

The final dependent variable was Wellbeing, one of the four main factors of Trait Emotional Intelligence (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). It reflects “a general sense of well-being, extending from past achievements to future expectations, overall, individuals with high scores feel positive, happy and fulfilled” (Petrides, 2009: 61). It was measured through 6 items such as *I generally believe that things will work out fine in my life*. Table 5 presents an overview of the second cluster of dependent variables.

Table 5.

Range, Means and Standard Deviations for the Second Cluster of Dependent Variables

| Variable | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | SD | Cronbach alpha |
|------------------------|---------|---------|------|------|----------------|
| Intrinsic Motivation | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.34 | 0.68 | 0.84 |
| Identified Regulation | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.21 | 0.67 | 0.58 |
| Introjected Regulation | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.87 | 0.95 | 0.82 |
| External Regulation | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.46 | 0.75 | 0.02 |
| Amotivation | 1.00 | 5.00 | 1.73 | 0.74 | 0.82 |
| Wellbeing | 1.20 | 7.00 | 5.62 | 1.05 | 0.83 |

A Spearman rank correlation analysis was run to check for intercorrelation between the dependent variables (see Table 6). It shows that all variables are positively linked, with the exception of amotivation. Three correlation coefficients have a small effect size (*Rho* between .25 and .399) or no significant effect (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). The dependent variables can thus be considered to be independent dimensions with limited overlap.

Table 6

Intercorrelation between the Dependent Variables

| | Attitude toward students and institution | Classroom practice | Intrinsic motivation | Introjected regulation | Amotivation | Well-being |
|--|--|--------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Attitude toward students and institution | - | .286** | .295** | .150** | -.291** | .272** |
| Classroom practice | | - | .328** | .186** | -.246** | .249** |
| Intrinsic motivation | | | - | .365** | -.291** | .270** |
| Introjected regulation | | | | - | -.016 | .057 |
| Amotivation | | | | | - | .270** |

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Results

A series of Kruskal Wallis analyses revealed that English proficiency level had a significant positive link with EFL teachers' attitudes toward their students and the institution where they taught: $Chi^2(2) = 14.6, p < .001$ (Figure 2), as well as with their classroom practices: $Chi^2(2) = 7.1, p < .029$ (Figure 3). The effect sizes are small (Field, 2018).

Figure 2
Mean Plot of Attitude toward Students and the Institution and Levels of Language Proficiency

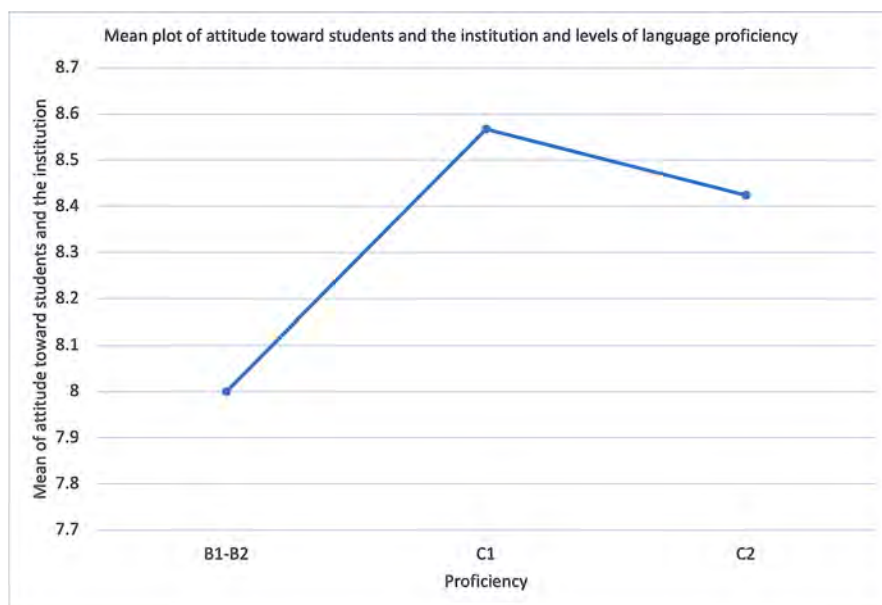
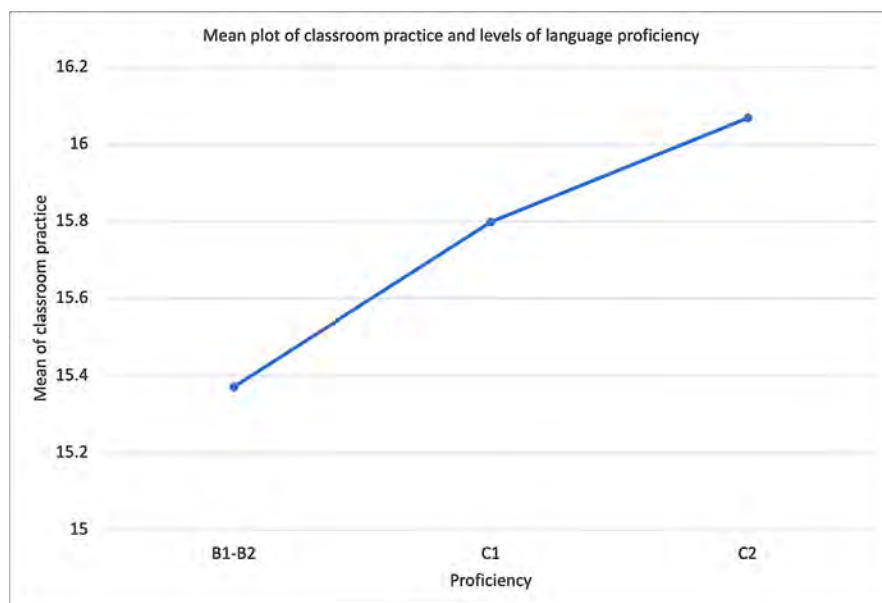


Figure 3
Mean Plot of Classroom Practice and Levels of Language Proficiency



A series of pairwise Kruskal Wallis comparisons showed that the B1-B2 group scored significantly lower than the C1 group (adjusted $p < .001$) and the C2 group (adjusted $p < .025$) in their positive attitude toward their students and the institution. The difference between the C1 and C2 groups was not significant (see Table 7).

Table 7

Pairwise Comparison of Attitude toward Students and the Institution and Language Proficiency

| | Test statistic | Std. Error | <i>p</i> | Adj. <i>p</i> * |
|------------|----------------|------------|----------|-----------------|
| B1, 2 – C1 | -50.0 | 13.6 | .001 | .001 |
| B1, 2 – C2 | -33.7 | 12.8 | .008 | .025 |
| C2 – C1 | 16.3 | 13.8 | .237 | .712 |

*Significance values adjusted with Bonferroni correction

A series of pairwise Kruskal Wallis comparisons revealed a similar significant pattern for the effect of proficiency on classroom practices, i.e. higher proficiency is linked to better self-perceived classroom management, pedagogic and didactic skills, being more creative in class, and more likely to enjoy lively students. The B1-B2 group scored significantly lower on classroom practice than the C2 group (adjusted $p = .024$). The difference between the B1-B2 group and the C1 group, and between the two advanced groups was not significant (see Table 8).

Table 8

Pairwise Comparison of Classroom Practice and Language Proficiency

| | Test statistic | Std. Error | <i>p</i> | Adj. <i>p</i> * |
|------------|----------------|------------|----------|-----------------|
| B1, 2 – C1 | -20.1 | 13.9 | .148 | .444 |
| B1, 2 – C2 | 34.5 | 13.0 | .008 | .024 |
| C2 – C1 | -14.4 | 14.1 | .307 | .920 |

*Significance values adjusted with Bonferroni correction

Proficiency was found to have a significant link with intrinsic motivation ($Chi^2(2) = 9.6, p < .008$) (Figure 4) and amotivation ($Chi^2(2) = 18.1, p < .001$) (Figure 5). A series of pairwise Kruskal Wallis comparisons revealed that lower levels of proficiency corresponded with significantly lower levels of intrinsic motivation. The B1-B2 group had significantly lower levels of intrinsic motivation than the C1 group (adjusted $p < .006$). The other comparisons were not significant (see Table 9).

Figure 4
Mean Plot of Intrinsic Motivation and Levels of Language Proficiency

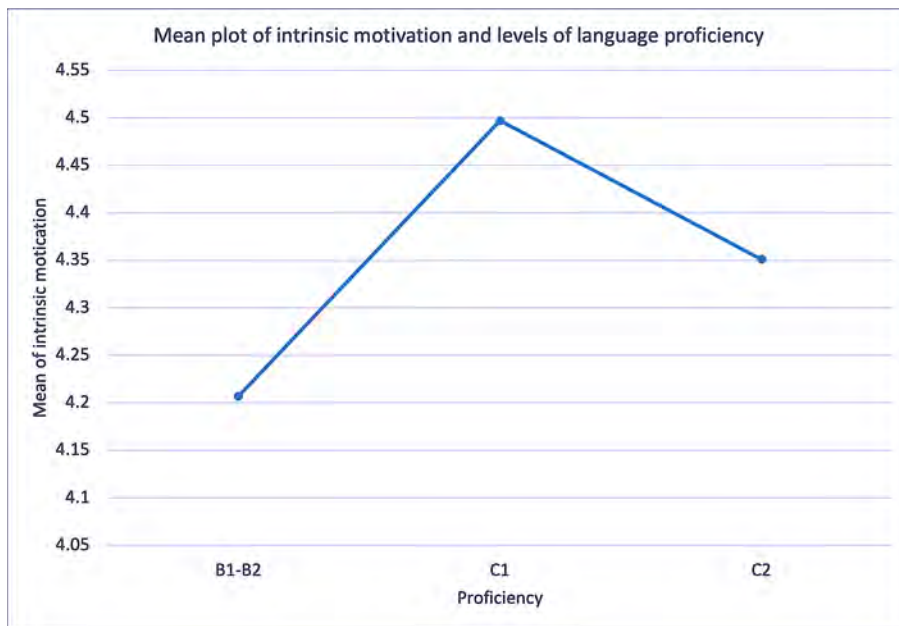


Figure 5
Mean Plot of Amotivation and Levels of Language Proficiency

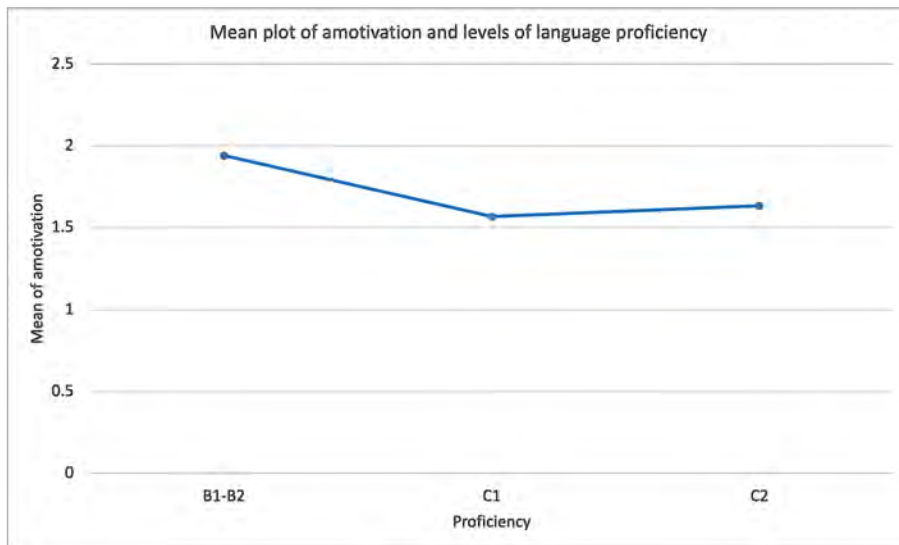


Table 9*Kruskal Wallis Pairwise Comparison of Intrinsic Motivation and Language Proficiency*

| | Test statistic | Std. Error | <i>p</i> | Adj. <i>p</i> * |
|------------|----------------|------------|----------|-----------------|
| B1, 2 – C1 | -42.1 | 13.6 | .002 | .006 |
| B1, 2 – C2 | -15.0 | 12.7 | .238 | .714 |
| C2 – C1 | 27.1 | 13.8 | .049 | .148 |

*Significance values adjusted with Bonferroni correction

A series of pairwise Kruskal Wallis comparisons revealed that lower levels of proficiency corresponded with higher levels of amotivation. The B1-B2 group had significantly higher levels of amotivation than the C1 group (adjusted $p < .0001$) and the C2 group (adjusted $p < .003$) (see Table 10).

Table 10*Kruskal Wallis Pairwise Comparison of Amotivation and Language Proficiency*

| | Test statistic | Std. Error | <i>p</i> | Adj. <i>p</i> * |
|------------|----------------|------------|----------|-----------------|
| B1, 2 – C1 | 53.2 | 13.6 | .001 | .001 |
| B1, 2 – C2 | 42.4 | 12.8 | .001 | .003 |
| C2 – C1 | -10.7 | 13.8 | .437 | 1.000 |

*Significance values adjusted with Bonferroni correction

A final series of pairwise Kruskal Wallis comparisons revealed that lower levels of proficiency were linked with lower levels of well-being, $Chi^2(2) = 8.6$, $p < .013$ (Figure 6). The B1-B2 group had significantly lower levels of well-being than the C1 group (adjusted $p < .011$). No other comparisons were significant (see Table 11).

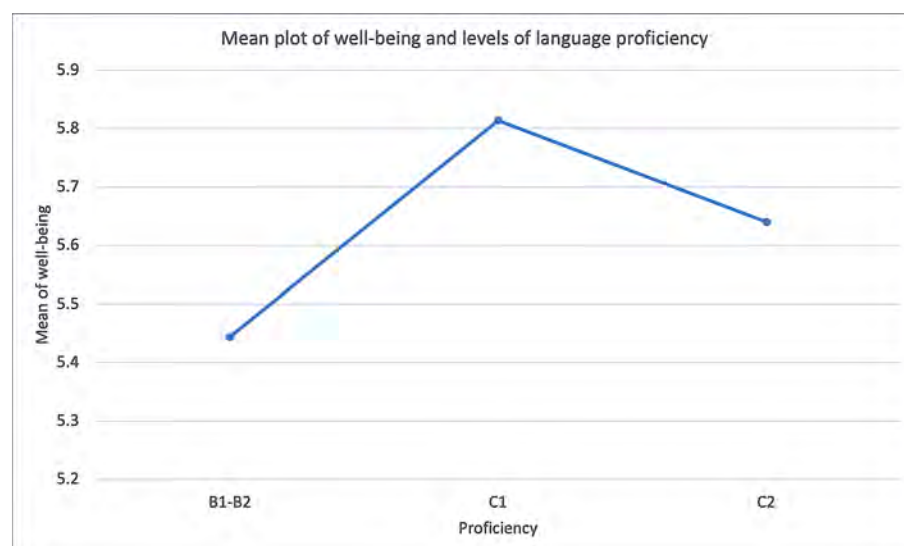
Figure 6*Mean Plot of Well-Being and Levels of Language Proficiency*

Table 11
Kruskal Wallis Pairwise Comparison of Well-Being and Language Proficiency

| | Test statistic | Std. Error | <i>p</i> | Adj. <i>p</i> * |
|------------|----------------|------------|----------|-----------------|
| B1, 2 – C1 | -40.9 | 14.0 | .004 | .011 |
| B1, 2 – C2 | -21.3 | 13.1 | .015 | .315 |
| C2 – C1 | 19.6 | 14.2 | .168 | .503 |

*Significance values adjusted with Bonferroni correction

Discussion

The first research question focused on the relationship between the actual English LX proficiency of EFL teachers and their attitudes toward their students and the institution where they taught, and their self-reported classroom practices. The second research question considered the link between proficiency and three dimensions of teacher motivation: intrinsic motivation, introjected motivation and amotivation. The third research question looked at the link between proficiency and well-being. Table 12 offers an overview of the findings, with independent variables sorted according to effect size (*r*). The effect sizes are below .250, and thus are all classified as small (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). It is striking that proficiency had a linear effect for classroom practices only but that the effect was curvilinear for the attitude variable, the two motivation and the well-being dimensions.

Table 12
Summary of Results with Variables Ordered According to Effect Size

| Dependent variable | Kruskal-Wallis test | Pairwise comparison | Adj. <i>p</i> | Std. test statistics | Square root of <i>N</i> | <i>r</i> |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------|
| Amotivation | $Chi^2(2) = 18.1$ $p < .001$ | B1, 2 – C1 | .001 | 3.8 | 19.3 | .201 |
| | | B1, 2 – C2 | .003 | 3.3 | 19.3 | .171 |
| Attitudes toward students and institution | $Chi^2(2) = 14.6$ $p < .001$ | B1, 2 – C1 | .001 | -3.6 | 19.3 | -.189 |
| | | B1, 2 – C2 | .025 | -2.6 | 19.3 | -.136 |
| Intrinsic motivation | $Chi^2(2) = 9.6$ $p = .008$ | B1, 2 – C1 | .006 | -3.1 | 19.3 | -.160 |
| Well-Being | $Chi^2(2) = 8.6$ $p = .013$ | B1, 2 – C1 | .011 | -2.9 | 19.3 | -.150 |
| Classroom practice | $Chi^2(2) = 7.0$ $p = .029$ | B1, 2 – C2 | .024 | -2.6 | 19.3 | -.137 |
| Introjected regulation | $Chi^2(2) = 5.9$ $p = ns$ | | | | | |

The findings confirm and expand previous research (Dewaele, 2018c, 2020; Dewaele et al., 2018; Digap, 2016; Farrell & Richards, 2007; Shin, 2008). It shows that English LX proficiency of EFL teachers is linked to their emotions, attitudes, motivation and even their

well-being. It concurs with the findings that a positive relationship exists between teacher' language proficiency, their self-confidence, efficacy and professional identity (Diagap, 2016; Faez & Karas, 2017). It also fits with the pattern reported in Faez, Karas and Uchihara's meta-analysis (2021) on the relationship between language proficiency and teaching ability of English LX teachers. An original finding is that LX teacher proficiency is not linked to teachers' attitudes (Dewaele & Mercer, 2018) but to their motivation and even their well-being. Higher proficiency LX teachers suffered less from amotivation, had stronger intrinsic motivation, had higher well-being and had more positive attitudes toward their students and their institution.

Moreover, proficiency was found to exert a particularly strong effect on self-reported classroom practices which included pedagogic and didactic skills and creativity. The finding fits nicely with H. M. Richards et al.'s (2013) observation that lower proficiency limits teachers' ability to improvise, to provide meaningful explanations and to give students rich language input.

The findings offer support to the idea that a proficiency threshold may exist for English LX teachers. Where significant proficiency effects were found, the differences were always bigger between the independent users (B1-B2) and the advanced users, than **within** the advanced group (C1 and C2) where the differences were never significant. It suggests that teachers who were assessed to be independent users (B1-B2 level) scored significantly lower for classroom practices, intrinsic motivation, attitudes toward students, well-being and scored significantly higher for amotivation than advanced users. Interpreting these results is challenging because causality could be bi-directional. While there is no doubt that being more proficient has positive consequences on attitudes, motivation well-being and classroom practices, one could argue that causality also runs in the opposite direction. All the dependent variables are interconnected (cf. Table 6) which means they could change together and could be linked to other variables. All variables, including unidentified ones, could have exerted a collective pull on proficiency, creating a feedback loop, where increased positivity in attitudes, emotion, well-being and motivation could have led to increased effort by the teacher to become more proficient. In other words, the causal pathways in the statistical analyses could be bi- or even multi-directional. Indeed, it is perfectly reasonable to assume that LX teachers who feel highly motivated by their job, who love their students, who feel creative in class, and who have a high sense of well-being, will do things in English both inside and outside the classroom that were not measured (cracking jokes with students, having them sing along, as well as extra-curricular activities like reading, watching films or material on the internet, going to a museum, finding English-speaking partners or friends) which could, all combined, boost proficiency in English. It may also be acknowledged that the sample, having been collected through a combination of convenience and purposive sampling, is not representative of the whole field of EFL teachers. However, given the large size of the sample and the diversity in background of the participants, the study may provide a glimpse of more general statistical patterns that exist among EFL teachers around the world. Finally, there was no information on participants' teaching degrees, which could also have explained some of the variation (Akbari & Moradkhani, 2012) but the pattern that university teachers scored higher on proficiency than secondary school colleagues fits the pattern reported in Digap (2016).

The finding that teachers with C2 levels of English do not do significantly better than those with C1 levels shows that it is not necessary to be maximally proficient in order to be a good teacher, confirming the argument in Horwitz (1996). However, the finding that teachers at B1-B2 levels scored significantly lower than colleagues at C1-C2 levels on some crucial

dimensions has important pedagogical implications. It could be used as an argument for educational authorities to assure that teachers have sufficient proficiency and organise regular in-service training to maintain and boost that proficiency. Investment in teachers' linguistic skills also represents a long-term investment in their emotional well-being. Crucially, having proficient, motivated and happy teachers will ultimately benefit their students.

The study is not without limitations, which are linked to the nature of the research design. Because the aim of the study was to identify broad statistical patterns about the effect of proficiency, there were no participants' voices which could have contributed to a more granular understanding of the phenomena that were observed. Interviews could provide explanations on why EFL teachers with a B1-B2 level lack confidence about their classroom practices, have lower intrinsic motivation, higher amotivation, less positive attitudes toward students, and lower well-being compared to their more proficient colleagues. Further qualitative research is needed to investigate this in more detail.

Conclusion

The present study found that University College London's C1 threshold for graduate students and for English LX users wishing to enrol in teacher training courses is spot on. While a higher proficiency is an extra strength for LX teachers, it ceases to matter much anymore once they reach the threshold of advanced users (C1 or C2). Proficiency does however start to have a stronger effect if English LX teachers are B1-B2 users or below because it limits their ability to create an optimal environment with sufficient rich language interactions which learners will enjoy and which is likely to quicken their progress as a result. Of course, the relationship between teachers' proficiency and teaching ability is complex and highly dynamic with several interacting variables. Part of the complexity of the relationship is related to the nature of proficiency itself which changes over time. The same is true for attitudes, emotion, motivation and well-being. Any teacher can testify to the occasional disappointment when a class does not go according to plan and, as a consequence, attitudes, emotion, motivation and well-being may sag momentarily. Trying to pin down the exact influence and position of each variable, and the relative distance between them, is akin to trying to frame a whorl of colourful flower petals gently swaying in the breeze in a black and white two-dimensional space.

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Systematic Work with Speaking Skills and Motivation in Second Language Classes

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Abstract

Learning a foreign language is more difficult for some students than others, and particularly speaking out loud in class may be a challenge. The aim of this study is to investigate the potential of a systematic approach to facilitate mastery, motivation and a supportive language learning environment, to limit foreign language anxiety. An intervention was carried out in different language learning contexts, including English classes in Norway and Poland and Spanish classes in Norway. The research material collected consists of student logs, student evaluations and self-reported data from a validated questionnaire on foreign language anxiety. The findings show that many students reported becoming more motivated and comfortable in class and that the method helped them work with strategies to overcome problems. Self-reported questionnaire data suggest that in two of three contexts, the foreign language anxiety level of the students decreased significantly during the intervention period. It may be difficult to generalise based on the findings presented here as the sample from each context is limited, the data is self-reported, the intervention period was limited and there is no control group. To strengthen the study's findings, triangulation of multiple data sources was used. To conclude, the five-step method presented in this study may be a useful strategy to facilitate developing motivation and creating a supportive learning environment in the language classroom. However, more longitudinal and extensive studies are needed to investigate the potential of the approach presented here further.

Keywords: learning strategies, foreign language anxiety, mastery, motivation, second language learning

Speaking is an essential communicative skill and thus a crucial element of L2 education. However, learners' inhibitions and negative emotions associated with speaking in the classroom, referred to as speaking anxiety (King & Smith, 2017), are a serious obstacle to effective L2 learning. In Krashen's language acquisition theory (1982), the role of the affective filter is emphasized – if a language learner feels anxious, learning will not progress. A pilot study from the project reported on here confirmed this anxiousness concerning speaking in class also in a Norwegian context (Horverak, Aanensen, Olsbu, Päplow, & Langeland, 2020), where one may assume that the level of proficiency is rather high (Education First, 2012). Many students were concerned about not speaking fluently or sounding sufficiently "English". Recognizing this problem in the context of teaching second or foreign languages in different contexts, a five-step method for learning languages was implemented, which included a series of discussion sessions aimed at creating a feeling of mastery and motivation.

The essence of the five-step method applied in this study is that the students identify what is important to them and what hinders them from speaking in a foreign language, and the class discusses possible solutions to obstacles. In this way, the students learn to take responsibility themselves for their own learning and development, and they also support each other to overcome the fear of speaking in a foreign language. Creating a pleasant and supportive environment is described as a basic motivational condition in relation to language learning, as well as promoting group cohesiveness through interaction and sharing, and developing a personal relationship with students (Dörnyei, 2001). This is at the centre of the five-step approach applied in the current study, which focuses on how students can develop strategies to overcome anxiety and improve their speaking skills in a foreign language.

The aim of this article is to investigate whether the five-step method applied may be a useful strategy to facilitate a) developing language learning strategies and motivation, b) creating a supportive learning environment in the language classroom and c) decreasing language anxiety. The method has been implemented in different language classes in upper secondary schools in Norway and Poland. The study investigates how working with the five-step method in class, both through discussions and individual reflections, influence the students' development in terms of feeling motivated, comfortable and in control in the language learning classroom, as well as possible changes in their language anxiety level. In the following, the language learning contexts included in this study are described and literature on foreign language anxiety is explored. Second, methodology and findings are described and discussed. The findings include student reflections on possible obstacles and strategies to apply when learning to speak a second language, as well as effects on foreign language anxiety. Finally, recommendations and conclusions are presented.

Language Learning Contexts

In both Norway and in Poland, English is taught from year 1 throughout the end of lower secondary school. In Poland, English has the status of being a foreign language, whereas in Norway, English has for some years had a special status as it is defined a second language in the curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2006). Still, it is not really an official language in Norway. Hence, it has a status somewhere in-between a second and a foreign language (Graddol, 1997; Rindal, 2012). In Norway, students choose to either attend vocational studies or general studies in upper secondary school, and one year of learning English is obligatory, after 10 years of English in primary and lower secondary school. Even though these are different types of study programmes with different aims, the English subject has the same curricula and exam in both contexts (Norwegian Directorate for Education and

Training, 2020). In Poland, the students also choose between vocational and general studies, and both learn English. There are higher requirements in general studies, and this context is quite like English classes in Norwegian upper secondary schools (Scheffler, Horverak, & Dominska., 2018). Only general studies students from Poland are included in this study, whereas both vocational and general studies students from Norway are included.

In addition to learning English, it is obligatory for students in Norway who want to complete general studies to learn a second foreign language, normally Spanish, German or French. It is voluntary to study a second foreign language in lower secondary school, but obligatory in general studies in upper secondary school. Spanish is the most popular language choice with 37% of students electing to study Spanish, 24% choosing to study German, and, 13% opting to study French (The Foreign Language Centre, 2021), but many students give up before they reach upper secondary school (Carrai, 2014). As all students attending general studies in upper secondary school must learn a foreign language in addition to English, many end up attending foreign language classes with low motivation, and they may not make the efforts necessary to learn a foreign language.

Research on Foreign Language Anxiety

There is much research on anxiety in relation to second language acquisition. This is also an important aspect in the current study. The notion of language anxiety includes both mental and physical symptoms:

The feelings associated with language anxiety [...] include tension, nervousness, worry, dread, upset, and similar terms. The physical dimension also is present – the heart races, the body sweats, the hands tremble, and there is a sinking feeling in the stomach. (MacIntyre and Gregersen, 2012, p. 195)

Anxiety is considered a major obstacle to overcome in learning to speak another language and being anxious may cause the student to avoid speaking and conveying difficult or personal messages in the target language, even though they may be talkative otherwise (Horwitz et al., 1986). An established understanding of the concept is found in Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety – scale (FLA-scale), which combines three various anxieties: Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation. Communication apprehension means a type of shyness or fear of talking to people. Test anxiety means that there is a fear of failure. Fear of negative evaluation concerns having expectations that others will give negative evaluations of one's performance. Other studies have questioned the construct proposed in the FLA-scale, as there is insufficient evidence to conclude that language anxiety is a unitary construct (Horwitz, 2017). This was not really Horwitz' concern either when developing the scale. Rather, she was concerned with having teachers acknowledge the importance of offering a less anxiety-inducing environment: "We don't need to thoroughly identify the components of Language Anxiety or understand the interactions among them before we can help anxious learners" (2017, p. 38).

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) can be related to the different basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Most often, FLA is tied with speaking, as this generally involves public evaluation, and it is the primary communication form in a classroom (King & Smith, 2017). Anxiety is also provoked in the case of learners at more advanced levels (Ewald, 2007; Horwitz, 1996; Tóth, 2011), and some students even report that the feeling of anxiety increases at the more advanced levels compared with earlier stages in their language learning. Feelings

of anxiety are related to perceptions of learning environments as challenging, perceived pressure to do well, fear of not meeting high expectations, doubts about one's own competence and concern about classmates' proficiency (Ewald, 2007; Tóth, 2011; Tóth, 2017). A study on the role of L1-use in the language classroom comparing a Norwegian and a Polish context shows results that confirm this tendency, that more proficient learners may be more anxious than students in contexts where less proficiency is expected (Scheffler et al., 2016). Surprisingly, Norwegian students, who are expected to be generally quite proficient in English (Education First, 2012), were more anxious about using the target language only in language classes compared with Polish students. This could be related to the fact that English has a status closer to a second language in Norway (Graddol, 1997; Rindal, 2012). Having problems mastering English proficiently could be quite embarrassing, adding stress to the language learning context.

Research on foreign language anxiety has also focused on giving evidence for correlations between language anxiety and test scores, and a negative correlation between anxiety and oral performance has been documented (Cheng et al., 1999; Hewitt & Stephenson, 2011; MacIntyre, 2017; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Phillips, 1992; Woodrow, 2006; Young, 1986). To what extent language anxiety influences performance may be influenced by the degree of anxiety. As pointed out by Şimşek and Dörnyei (2017), there are different types of foreign language anxiety. They list three main categories, a) anxiety as a personality trait, b) anxiety as a context-dependent construct, and c) anxiety as integrated in the life story. Depending on what type of reason lies behind the foreign language anxiety, different treatments may be needed. According to Oxford (2017), one solution to the problem of being an anxious language learner is to reclaim agency, meaning that learners understand their feelings and use these to guide their thinking and take action to control their own learning. Agency is a central concept in the five-step method applied in the current study, as this method is about reclaiming agency through identifying success factors and obstacles and taking steps to make a change in one's own situation (Langeland & Horverak, 2021).

Method

This study utilized a mixed method approach (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), combining qualitative and quantitative data on the student level. The central research question of the investigation was:

How can a systematic approach to working with mastery and motivation contribute to creating a supportive language learning environment that limits foreign language anxiety?

An intervention was carried out over a period of 4-6 weeks, and the students filled in the Foreign Language Anxiety scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) before and after the intervention. An evaluation form with open and closed questions was also used after the intervention period. In addition, the students' reflections from logbooks were included in the qualitative data. All the collected data was anonymous.

Intervention

The intervention (see figure 1) included 3 to 4 sessions where students identified the following:

- 1) What is important to me when learning to speak English/Spanish?

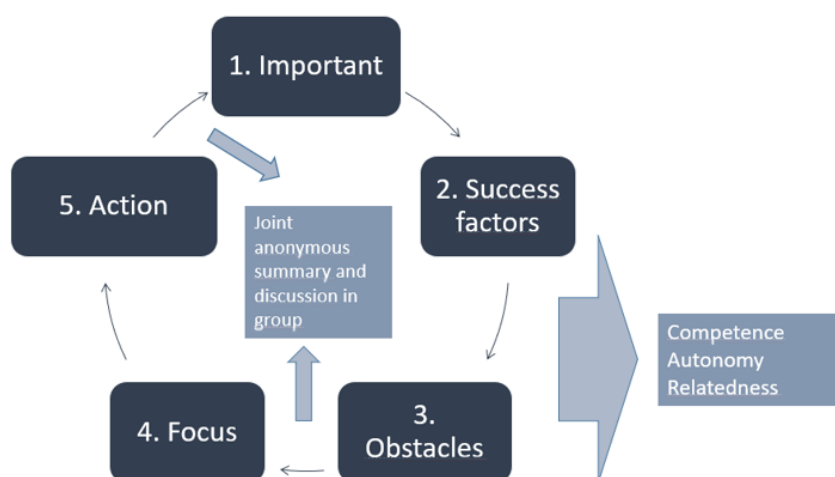
- 2) What do I already master?
- 3) What hinders me from speaking English/Spanish?
- 4) What do I need to focus on?
- 5) What specifically will I do to keep this focus?

The intervention was carried out in L1 in Spanish classes, and in L2 in English classes, with translation to L1 when necessary.

In the first session, the students discussed questions 1-3, and then wrote anonymous individual answers to questions in logbooks that the teacher collected at the end of each session. The students chose a confidential code to identify their logbooks. At the start of the second session, the teacher summed up the anonymous reflections in class. Following this, the students discussed what they could do about possible obstacles to succeed at becoming better speakers of English or Spanish and gave examples to each other about how they could work to improve their speaking skills. The session ended with the students writing individual answers in their logbooks and the teacher collecting their reflections. In the following sessions, the students answered questions 4 and 5 repeatedly, and discussed further how they could improve their strategies.

Figure 1

The Five-Step Method (Horverak & Aanensen, 2019)



Data Collection and Analyses

The Foreign Language Anxiety scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) that was used in this study consists of 33 items with 5-point Likert scales from 1 to 5 (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree). The scale includes three related performance anxieties; communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Examples of items included in the scale are “I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class”, “I don’t worry about making mistakes in language class”, “I tremble when I know that I’m going to be called on in language class” and “It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language”. In the analysis, tests of statistical significance were performed on the entire scale to determine whether there were any significant differences between pre- and post-intervention scores in three language learning contexts: Norwegian students learning English, Norwegian students learning Spanish and Polish students learning English.

In addition to filling in the FLA-scale, self-reported data on how the students perceived the method was collected. They reported on whether the method helped them find out what was essential in learning to speak English or Spanish, the extent to which the method motivated them, what they focused on, how closely they followed their plan, whether, and how, they became better at working with what is difficult, whether they felt more comfortable in class and whether they liked using the method. The items included in the questionnaire and results are presented in bar charts. The qualitative material in this study also comprised reflections from the students' logbooks, which had been thematically analysed inductively, meaning that the themes emerged from the material (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Sample

The participants were students from vocational and general studies in Norway and general studies in Poland. The Polish students were teenagers, and the Norwegian students were either teenagers or adult immigrants who studied English or Spanish at the upper secondary level (table 1). There was a total of 156 participants in the study, and data was collected from three different institutions.

The sample for each context was limited, and there was no control group, but qualitative research does not always require a large group of participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 157; Cohen et al., 2011, p. 162). The variety of the settings contributed to a complex, detailed understanding of the issue, central in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, p. 48), which supported the validity of the study.

Table 1
Participants

| Studies | Language | Year | Age | Students in class | Participants |
|---|----------|------|--------|-------------------|--------------|
| Vocational (Health and Care)** | English | 1 | Adults | 15 | 15 |
| Vocational (Restaurant and Food Processing)* | English | 1 | Adults | 11 | 7 |
| Vocational (Paramedics) | English | 2 | 17-18 | 14 | 14 |
| Vocational (Children and youth)* | English | 2 | 17-18 | 17 | 11 |
| Vocational (Restaurant and Food Processing)** | English | 2 | Adults | 7 | 6 |
| General studies | English | 1 | 16-17 | 30 | 29 |
| General studies* | Spanish | 2 | 17-18 | 22 | 22 |
| General studies | Spanish | 1 | 15-16 | 25 | 23 |
| General studies, Poland | English | 1 | 15-16 | 32 | 29 |
| Total number of students | | | | 173 | 156 |

Note: * The classes did not complete evaluations and/or FLA scales due to corona restrictions ** Adult immigrant classes, FLA-scale not filled in due to challenges with Norwegian.

As for English, there were five vocational studies classes, three of which were adult immigrant classes from Health and Care studies, year 1 and Restaurant and Food Processing, year 1 and 2. The Restaurant and Food Processing class was the same class over two years, and most of the students were the same. The other vocational classes consisted of students who specialised

in children and youth or were studying to become paramedics (year 2). There were also two first year general studies classes, one from Norway and one from Poland. The participants who studied Spanish were first- and second-year general studies students in Norway.

Findings

A thematic analysis is presented revealing what factors students considered to be crucial when learning to speak a foreign language and what they perceived to be their success factors and obstacles. In addition, the analysis presents what the students chose to focus on and types of strategies applied. The data from the English-classes and the Spanish-classes are presented separately. The students' evaluations answered the questions on whether the students felt that they had become more motivated and better at finding strategies, and whether they felt more comfortable in class. Finally, the results from the FLA-scale reveal how the intervention influenced the students' level of language anxiety.

Thematic Analysis of Students' Reflections in English

There are various themes present in the material from the student reflections, and the themes differ somewhat in the Norwegian (NO) and the Polish (PL) context (table 2). Similar items in the material were identified and grouped as themes, and these were chosen as they represented answers to questions concerning what students found important, what they considered they already mastered that could help them to learn speaking the foreign language, and what prevented them. In the Norwegian sample, many students mentioned that it is essential to practice or get the opportunity to speak in class (27), and this was only mentioned by three from the Polish sample. Some students reported that pronunciation is of significance (NO: 16, PL: 12), and fluency was also mentioned in the Polish data (6). Vocabulary was mentioned as crucial in both samples (NO 13, PL: 22) to succeed with speaking English. Understanding or listening to English was also mentioned by many Norwegian students (26), but only three Polish students. Grammar (NO: 11, PL: 19) and reading (NO: 7) were also fundamental aspects that were highlighted. Some Norwegian students also reflected on the importance of watching films or series (9) to improve their skills. In the vocational groups, the fact that English is a world language (9) was mentioned. In the Polish data, confidence was a prominent theme (18), and openness (9). Overcoming anxiety was also mentioned by four students.

Table 2*Themes in Student Reflections on Priorities, Success Factors, and Obstacles in Speaking in L2*

| Theme | Important | | Success factors | | Obstacles | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|----|-----------------|----|-----------|----|
| | NO | PL | NO | PL | NO | PL |
| Speaking/Practice | 27 | 3 | 27 | 3 | 9 | - |
| Pronunciation | 16 | 12 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 3 |
| Fluency | - | 6 | - | 9 | - | 3 |
| Listening/understanding/communication | 26 | 3 | 26 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Vocabulary | 13 | 22 | 7 | 18 | 7 | 9 |
| Grammar | 11 | 19 | 7 | 17 | 18 | 9 |
| Reading | 7 | - | 20 | - | 1 | - |
| Writing | - | - | 9 | - | 2 | - |
| Watching TV/films | 9 | - | 30 | 6 | - | - |
| Use social media/the internet | - | - | 13 | - | - | - |
| English as a world language | 9 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Ideas/content | - | 1 | - | 5 | - | 3 |
| Confidence | - | 18 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 13 |
| Anxiety (overcoming) | - | 4 | - | 1 | 37 | 21 |
| Openness | - | 9 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Mixing languages | - | - | - | - | 3 | - |

Note: NO= Norwegian, n = 94; PL = Poland, n = 32.

When it comes to success factors, many Norwegian students reported that they are good at speaking English (27), without specifying what they meant by this, and they understand what others say (26). In the Polish sample, only three mentioned being good at speaking and two that they understand English well. Many of the Norwegian students reported that the fact that they watch TV or films (30) is a success factor as it helps them become better in English. Six Polish students reported the same and using the internet or social media was mentioned by several Norwegian students (13). Reading (20) was also mentioned several times by Norwegian students, and some also reported that they are good at writing English (9). Only a few Norwegian students mentioned vocabulary (7) grammar (7) and pronunciation (3) as success factors. In comparison, many Polish students listed vocabulary (18) and grammar (17) as success factors. Pronunciation was mentioned by four Polish students, and nine mentioned fluency in the English language as a success factor. Being confident was mentioned by only three Norwegian students, but by eight Polish students. Finding ideas or content was mentioned as a success factor by five Polish students.

Concerning obstacles, anxiety was clearly the dominant factor (NO: 37, PL: 21), and some also mentioned a lack of confidence (NO: 6, PL: 13), which is related to having anxiety to speak. Examples of the anxiety reported by some of the Norwegian students follow:

It is scary in front of the whole class, some laugh/tease, even though it is just for fun, it makes me uncertain. Being afraid of pronouncing words in the wrong way, or using the wrong words.

I want to talk English, but I don't dare because I have a Norwegian accent, many grammar mistakes, and little vocabulary.

I often start to studder if I am to speak or read in English.

I am afraid to sound very Norwegian-English when pronouncing words.

Afraid to say something wrong. Afraid that people will laugh out at me.

Personally, it is knowing everyone hears my voice in the room, and my voice is the only voice in the room. Everyone listens to me and me only. It makes me nervous.

Another, somewhat more serious reflection, also revealed low self-esteem in general:

I have managed to pull myself down and my parents have been a great help with that, telling me every day I won't succeed and I'm a failure, that there was a big chance that I had to repeat 10th grade because I'm so bad at everything.

Another obstacle reported by many was grammar (NO: 18, PL: 9). Some Norwegian students mentioned that they did not get enough speaking practice (9). Other students struggled with pronunciation (NO: 8, PL: 3), or had insufficient vocabulary (NO: 7, PL: 9). The obstacles identified mainly referred to general difficulties, but also the challenge associated with having to learn two Germanic languages (Norwegian and English) at the same time was mentioned by some of the adult learners from the Norwegian context (3). In the Polish sample, some students mentioned problems with finding ideas (3) and achieving fluency (3) as obstacles.

Table 3
Students' Action Plans

| Theme | Focus | | Planned action 1 | |
|-----------------------------|-------|----|------------------|----|
| | NO | PL | NO | PL |
| Speaking practice | 14 | - | 40 | 15 |
| Pronunciation | 4 | 3 | 7 | 4 |
| Speaking fluency | - | 9 | - | 5 |
| Listening | 6 | - | 10 | - |
| Vocabulary | 22 | 18 | 13 | 12 |
| Grammar | - | 3 | - | 2 |
| Reading | 9 | - | 18 | 4 |
| Writing | 10 | - | 11 | 4 |
| Watch TV/films | 10 | - | 12 | 19 |
| Use internet resources/apps | - | - | - | 13 |
| Recording | - | - | 3 | - |
| Thinking in English | - | - | - | 10 |
| Doing exercises | - | - | - | 7 |
| Overcome anxiety | 4 | 7 | - | 3 |

| Confidence | 10 | 7 | 8 | 5 |
|------------|----|---|---|---|
|------------|----|---|---|---|

Note: NO= Norwegian, n = 94; PL = Poland, n = 32.

The students emphasized their desire to focus on skills that are vital to speech development in English. Many students reported that they wanted to focus on increasing their vocabulary (NO: 22, PL: 18) and practice speaking was mentioned by several Norwegian students (14). Other Norwegian students said that they would focus on writing (10), reading (9), watching films or series (10), listen to English in general (6), and improving their pronunciation (4). The Polish students also reported that they wanted to focus on pronunciation (3) and fluency (9). Quite a few students planned to focus on strengthening their confidence (NO: 10, PL: 7) and overcoming their anxiety (NO: 4, PL: 7).

Many students had plans to practice speaking (NO: 40, PL: 15), for example through gaming, communication via social media, practicing tongue twisters, speaking in safe surroundings, raising hands, and speaking in class. Others report that they will read (NO: 18, PL: 4), write (NO: 11, PL: 4), listen to English (NO: 10) and watch TV or films (NO: 12, PL: 19). Some wanted to work with strategies to improve their vocabulary (NO: 13, PL: 12) and some wished to practice how to pronounce words (NO: 7, PL: 4). Five Polish students mentioned practice speaking fluency and three Norwegian students mentioned specifically that they planned to record themselves speaking English to find out what they need to improve. Some of the students chose to try to be more confident (NO: 8, PL: 5), and one of the Norwegian students suggested “*I can also speak English with people I trust, friends and family, then I can become more confident*”. In the Polish sample, 13 mentioned using internet resources or apps, ten reported that they wanted to try to think in English, seven reported that they would do exercises and three were going to work with overcoming anxiety.

After the second session, the students were to improve their action plans and make them more explicit. A Norwegian student with the action plan “*Finding more English words*” from the first session improved the plan to “*Learn at least 5 words every week. Making quizlet to the new words every week*”. Another Norwegian student wrote “*Listen to podcasts in English*” in the first plan, and “*Listen to an English podcast episode every week, if there are some difficult words I don’t know from before, I write them down in a book I have at home, and what they mean*”. A final example shows that a Norwegian student improved the plan from “*Talking out loud to myself [...] recording myself when talking*” to “*Narrating what I am doing every day after school [...] read some pages of a book out loud for myself every day and record it*”. The revised plans reflected both growth in language, through more advanced vocabulary and sentences, and in organization, as they specified how they would organize their work with improving their speaking skills.

Thematic Analysis of Student Reflections in Spanish

In Spanish classes, the most important focus areas chosen to improve oral skills were to achieve good grades (5), work more with the subject (7), pay attention in class (3), find motivation (3), focus on oral skills (6) and improve vocabulary (3). As for success factors, meaning personality traits or skills that could potentially help the students improve their Spanish, the following are mentioned:

I have a good pronunciation. (3)

I have a high ability to cram vocabulary.

I have a good memory. (3)

I am able to compare Spanish and English” (4)

My vocabulary is good. (3)

I have an extrovert personality. (3).

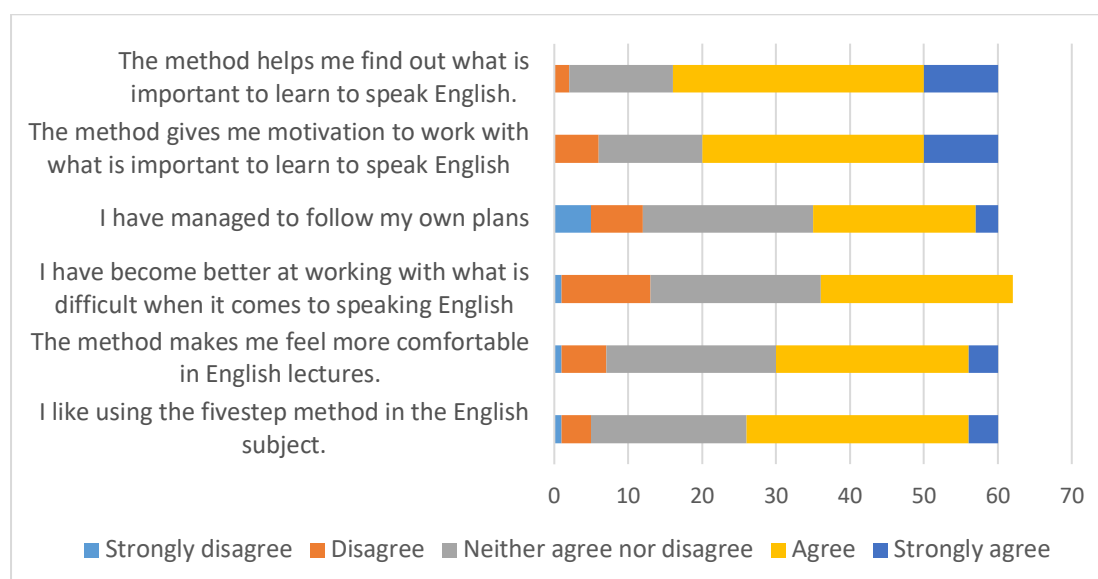
Concerning the obstacles encountered by the students when learning Spanish and which prevented them from speaking the language, the students mentioned poor grammar skills (20), struggles to comprehend the target language (3), lack of vocabulary (14) and lack of motivation (3). Regarding grammar, the ability to conjugate verbs and having command of grammatical rules were explicitly mentioned as needs. To improve their Spanish skills, the students wanted to focus on learning grammatical rules (22), improve vocabulary (16), speak more Spanish (7), be more “active” in class (3), watch films and other visual media (3), and achieve good grades (3). The strategies the students chose were to complete more homework (11) watch films, series, and other media (15), listen to music, podcasts and other audio media (7), work with grammar (7), speak more Spanish (6), read more Spanish (4) and write more Spanish (3).

Evaluations of the Approach in English Classes

The evaluations from English classes in Norway showed that many of the students appreciated the approach, and felt it was useful and motivating to apply the five-step method (figure 2). Of 60 students, 44 reported that they agree or strongly agree that the method assisted them in identifying significant aspects of English to be learned and 40 agree that the method has given them motivation.

Figure 2

English in Norwegian Upper Secondary School Classes, n = 60



Twenty-five students reported having followed their own plans, and 26 have become better at working with what is difficult. In terms of learning environment, 30 students report that the method makes them more comfortable in English lectures, and 34 like using the five-step

method. Many students were uncertain concerning how they felt about the method, and only a few disagreed that the method is useful and motivating. The students also report having improved strategies to deal with language learning:

“I have understood what my obstacles are and found the «solution» to this problem.

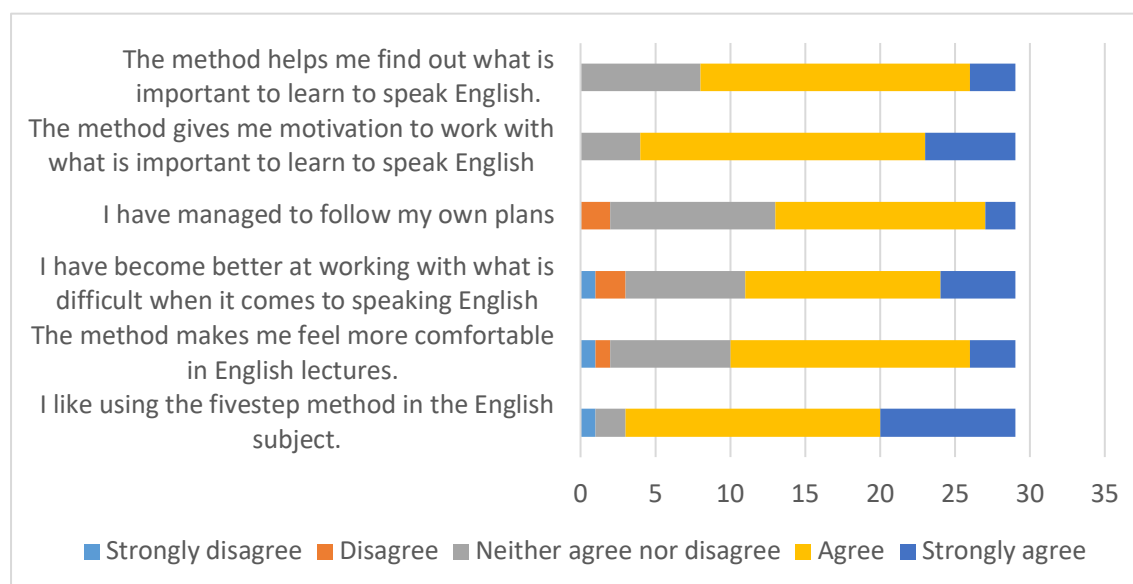
As I made a concrete plan on how to work with the language it is easier to actually do it.

I have increased my English vocabulary, which makes it easier to speak English.

The evaluation data from the Polish learners are also indicative of a positive attitude to the method.

Figure 3

English in a Polish Upper Secondary School Class, n = 29



The majority of the students either agreed or strongly agreed that the method is beneficial, which can perhaps be seen most clearly in the case of the last statement: 17 students agreed and 9 students strongly agreed that they liked using the five-step method in their English classes. Apart from this general statement, most specific issues were also seen as positively affected by the method. In particular, the students appreciated the impact of the method on their motivation to work on what is crucial to speak English, something 25 students agreed on, and 21 students agreed that the method helped them find out what is fundamental to the development of spoken English. Also, 16 students reported that they had been able to implement their plans, which often involved working on English vocabulary and overcoming the fear of speaking and making mistakes, as in the following comments:

I worked on my fear of making mistakes, and on feeling shame at not being able to speak fluently.

I tried not to think too much about correctness, about grammar.

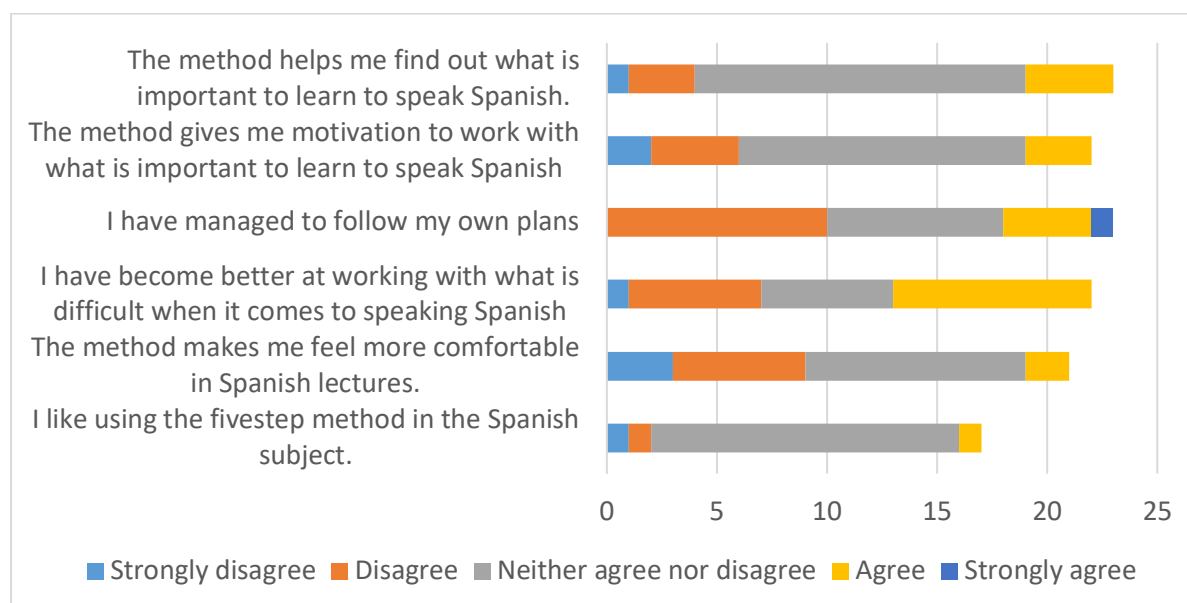
No students in the material, neither the Norwegian nor the Polish, reported specifically on how they worked with their fear of speaking and making mistakes.

Evaluations of the Approach in Spanish Classes

The results of the evaluation showed that the Norwegian students learning Spanish did not find the approach particularly valuable as a tool to improve their Spanish skills. Only four students agreed that the method helped them figure out what is important to learn to be able to speak Spanish, and only three students said that the method gave them motivation (figure 4).

Figure 4

Spanish in a Norwegian Upper Secondary School Class, n = 17-22.



Note: Year 2 students did not complete the evaluation due to COVID-19 restrictions.

On the other hand, the students openly admitted that they had not been able to follow their own plans to a great extent. There was no information about why they did not manage this. Only five students agreed that they had followed their plans. However, nine students agreed that they had become better at working with what is difficult. One of the students ended the evaluation with a positive reflection:

What motivates me is the joy that I feel. It gives me an extreme feeling of accomplishment. I would also very much like to use languages in my future studies. Right now, learning languages is my biggest and most fun hobby. I want to learn languages all my life, because when you know languages, you see things in new and different ways.

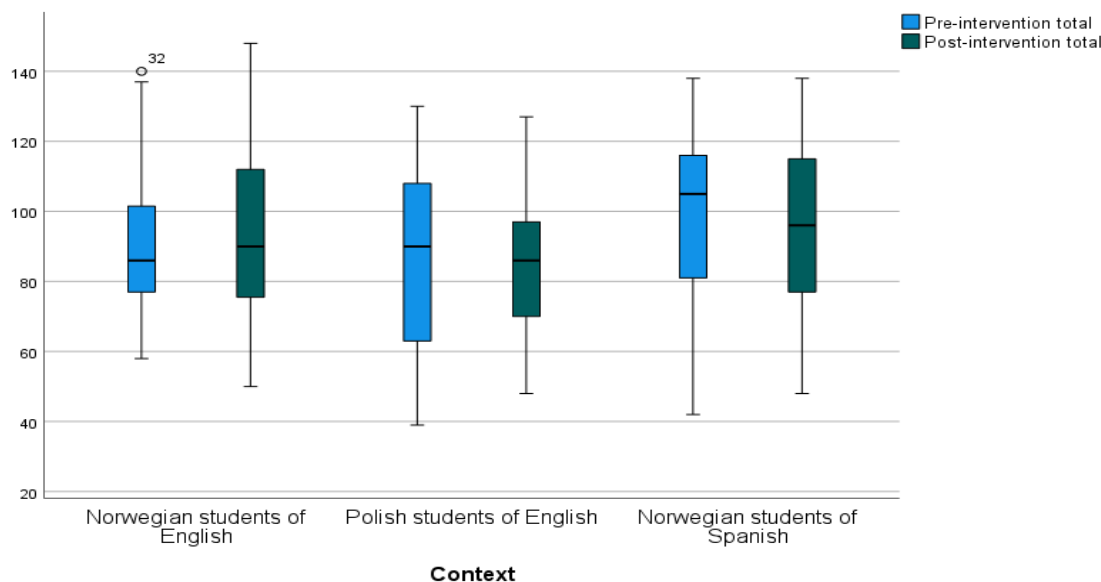
Foreign Language Anxiety

The levels of foreign language anxiety as measured by the FLA questionnaire before and after the intervention are presented in Figure 5 below. Not all students who attended the sessions were present for both administrations of the questionnaire, and therefore, the plots are based on the following samples: the Norwegian Spanish learners: 18; The Norwegian English

learners: 31; The Polish English learners: 28. The minimum possible total score is 33, and the maximum is 165.

Figure 5

Distribution of Total Scores in the FLA Questionnaire



A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was performed on the pre- and post-intervention scores in each of the contexts to check for significant differences. The test revealed statistically significant differences in the Polish-English ($Z = 83.5$, $p = .011$) and the Norwegian-Spanish context ($Z = 27.5$, $p = .02$). No statistically significant difference was found for the Norwegian-English group ($Z = 277$, $p = .36$).

Discussion

In general, the results show that many students in English classes appreciated the five-step method applied in this study, and it helped them develop language learning strategies and motivation, as well as a greater degree of comfort in class. The method appears to have facilitated a supportive learning environment for several students. The FLA questionnaire indicates a significant decrease in the level of language anxiety for two of the three examined contexts. There was a significant change in the context of learning English in Poland and Spanish in Norway, but not in the context of learning English in Norway. Perhaps the difference in the two English learning contexts is related to the fact that English teaching and requirements are somewhat different in Norway compared with Poland (Scheffler et al., 2018).

Previous research shows that lower levels of anxiety are associated with increased levels of teacher support and enhanced student involvement in learning (Palacios, 1998, Horwitz, 2017). Applying the five-step method as presented in this study involves teacher support and student engagement, and this may be the reason why students report positively on the experience and effect of the intervention. Learners with language anxiety often feel a lack of agency. Yet, taking control of their own language learning process and applying a range of learning strategies may assist them in improving their feeling of agency, meaning their capacity to affect outcomes (Oxford, 2017).

One may wonder why there is such anxiety about speaking a foreign language in class. One hypothesis is that self and language are closely tied, and a threat to one of these is a threat to the other (Cohen & Norst, 1989). The student reflections showed that quite a few students felt anxious about speaking in class, which may be expressions of context-dependent anxiety (Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017). Creating an open and safe atmosphere, as suggested by Dörnyei (2001), may be a solution to support these students in overcoming their fears about speaking out loud in class, and this is what the five-step method is about.

The student reflections also revealed that there was language anxiety in all contexts where English was taught. This was not a problem particularly for weaker students, all types of students seemed to be nervous about speaking out loud, or “*Not sounding like an Englishman*”. This confirms previous findings from research, that anxiety is also a problem for learners at more advanced levels (Ewald, 2007; Horwitz, 1996; Tóth, 2011). The learners of Spanish classes in Norway, a language learning context where less proficiency is expected compared to that of English classes, are not as anxious as the learners in Norwegian English classes. This substantiates the idea that anxiety increases at the more advanced levels (Ewald, 2007; Tóth, 2011). A person may also have different anxiety profiles in different languages (Dewaele, 2002). Even though a student is anxious about speaking English, the same anxiety is perhaps not present in, for example, Spanish classes.

Recommendations

The five-step method presented in this study seems to have potential to create a supportive learning atmosphere in language classes and to support students in learning a foreign language. Some psychological aspects may appear, like high levels of anxiety. These should be delegated to other professionals than to a teacher.

As this study has clear limitations, more extensive and longitudinal studies are needed to explore the potential of the five-step method further. As much language anxiety research has focused on defining the construct and finding correlations between anxiety and outcome (Horwitz, 2017), there is a need for more research focused on how to help anxious learners. To quote Horwitz, there are some logical steps to reduce anxiety: “talk with our students, listen to their stories, share our own difficulties, let them have more control over their learning and give them opportunities for genuine communication in a safe environment” (2017, p. 44). These steps are integrated in the five-step method presented in this study.

Conclusions

This study shows that applying the five-step method presented here may support some students in developing language learning strategies and motivation, as well as contributing to a supportive learning environment. Considering the results, visibility of collective challenges may lead to individual and collective efforts, which again may contribute to general safety and relief of anxiety. However, there are limitations with this study. To strengthen reliability, multiple data sources were used in the analyses. Despite limitations, the analyses and reflections presented here may elicit some aspects concerning working with speaking skills and motivation in language classes that are interesting for stakeholders, such as teachers or teacher training educators.

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A Corpus-Based Comparison of Inclusiveness in L2 Reading Materials for Refugee Children

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Abstract

Despite increased emphasis on the role of inclusive practices and materials in post-COVID-19 classrooms and warnings about implicit biases against disadvantaged groups, the textbook problem has rarely been approached with equity measures in mind. This multimethod study aimed to investigate to what extent L2 reading materials, locally produced and used for refugee education in Turkey and New Zealand, include all children with different proficiency levels, gender identities and cultural backgrounds using corpus-driven methods. All verbal and nonverbal texts from ten thematically similar third-grade storybooks were subjected to qualitative and quantitative analysis. Comparisons against measures of grammatical and lexical complexity, and of gender and cultural equity revealed that despite both being far from achieving the ideal composition for creating inclusive learning-friendly environments, TSL materials were lagging further behind ESL counterparts. They depended on almost uniform sets of easy-to-read narratives embodying simpler grammatical features and high-frequency words, and thus needed extension with relatively elaborate ones to accommodate mixed-abilities. Gender disparities were institutionalised through male overrepresentation in hero-making, negative stereotyping, familial and occupational identification, and engagement in monetary and mobility activities, but occasionally ameliorated, in the ESL case, by reversing conventionally-gendered domestic, technical and intellectual skills in texts and illustrations. The widest gap was observed in cultural representations because TSL materials, written from a tourist's perspective, focused on imposing superficial knowledge of target-culture elements, and ESL materials on ensuring relevance through greater use of elements from diverse cultures. Therefore, egalitarian representations in gendered and cultural contents are required for their rehabilitation.

Keywords: equity, inclusive learning-friendly environments, refugee children

As the third anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic approaches, one thing the world has learned is that regardless of age, gender, class, colour, ethnicity, creed and geography, everyone can become vulnerable to multiple losses (i.e. of their lives, loved ones, homes, jobs and schools) within a breath, and in the absence of welcoming communities, they may come out of this global ordeal materially and emotionally needier than before. Therefore, one of the principal buzzwords of the new millennium in education, “inclusion”, has been gaining wider acceptance with the help of the democratising virus, which already changed the learning mediums dramatically, for instance, by moving classes online and increasing accessibility (or sometimes lack thereof) for all kinds of teachers and students around the world. Since the introduction of the concept of inclusion by the UNESCO Salamanca Statement, what started out as a deficit-based medical model of educating disabled children separately in special schools, and later with non-disabled peers in mainstream classrooms has eventually evolved into its interactional version, where individual learner differences are treated not as problem sources but rather as opportunities for teachers to enrich mutual learning experiences (Ainscow, 2020; Smith, 2018; Stadler-Heer, 2019). This shift towards inclusive education can certainly be defended from different angles: the necessity of educating all children together leads to development of innovative teaching methods that create learning environments responsive to their specific needs (educational), assists to ingrain the principles of justice and non-discrimination in the future adults (social), economises on educational costs by not establishing different types of special schools (economic) and derives from the basic human right to get equitable access to quality education (legal) (Ainscow, 2020).

Whichever of these agendas are pursued in educational settings, it is essentially “equity” in provision of what exactly every learner needs to thrive rather than “equality” of shares in treatment that gives a greater reason to fully embrace inclusive transformation in the language classrooms as well (Smith, 2018). Compared to most teacher-led content-area classes, language lessons can be claimed to provide a more conducive atmosphere to supportive learning for two immediate reasons. Neurodiversity, language, culture and emotion-related learning difficulties become more detectable during language use, and especially English language teachers’ familiarity with communicative methodologies and materials puts them at an advantage in terms of the implementation of inclusive education (Smith, 2018). When it comes to tackling different learning challenges, they have been observed to capitalise on their long-standing experience in differentiating and scaffolding the learning content and processes mainly through the use of access-self, multilevel and multimodal texts, participatory and multisensory activities, explicit grammar and strategy instruction and also bilingual support (British Council, 2012; Glas et al., 2021; Smith, 2018; Stadler-Heer, 2019; Tomlinson, 2011).

According to this year’s report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2021), the education of over 1.5 billion learners globally has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but 7.9 million refugee children, with already high out-of-school rates (48%), may possibly have been hardest hit by the school closures. In other words, more than half of refugee students might also be estimated to have been struggling with learning in an alien classroom, where the lesson is delivered in a different language from their own, and through learning materials that are written for children with different personal, language, learning and cultural backgrounds. As a result, the second/additional (L2) language teacher’s use of inclusive practices and materials has become more critical than ever in order to reduce the language learner’s vulnerability and foster resilience in refugee children. Also, UNESCO (2015) strongly emphasises the role of teaching materials in ensuring inclusiveness in the classroom, and warns about the hidden prejudice and discrimination against disadvantaged groups. Yet, rarely has the textbook problem been approached with equity measures in mind.

For this reason, the current study focuses on assessing whether the reading materials used for teaching Turkish and English as a second language (TSL/ESL) reflect diversity in terms of learner abilities, gender and culture, or, in other words, how level-appropriate, gender-fair and non-discriminatory they are for arming refugee learners with the enabling knowledge of languages.

Literature Review

Detailed overviews of various literacy and language programs for displaced people in Hanemann's (2018) background paper for UNESCO's *2019 Global Education Monitoring Report* have demonstrated that despite higher concentrations of refugees and migrants in the Arab world, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, the educational needs of young and adult refugees can be argued to have largely gone unnoticed on the basis of limited information on literacy and language provision for them. On the other hand, those settling in high-income regions such as North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand are provided with better educational facilities because the inclusion of refugees in the labour market is regarded as "a priority goal", and at least basic or secondary education and proficiency in the host language must be attained "to succeed in post-industrial economies" (Hanemann, 2018, p. 57). In their efforts to foster social integration through L2 proficiency, they also take a whole-of-government approach and implement a variety of school-based interventions according to refugee learners' individual needs (Auckland UniServices, 2007; Hanemann, 2018). In the New Zealand context, the following practices have thus been recommended (Auckland UniServices, 2007; Hanemann, 2018):

- Initial, diagnostic and curriculum-based assessments of both L1 and L2 are carried out to improve instructional planning and provide appropriate learning experiences.
- Non-English-speaking-background (NESB) children are included in mainstream classes to increase interaction and reduce stigmatisation by native-English-speaking peers.
- Pull-out ESL classes are developed for the ones with special needs (e.g. true beginners or traumatised refugees) and made more relevant through connections with content-area learning.
- Peer-tutoring, pairing new arrivals with English-speaking peers, or preferably L1-speaking former refugees (e.g. as cultural facilitators) is utilised for familiarising them with the New Zealand school system.
- The curriculum also draws on the home languages, cultures and experiences of refugee children.
- The responsibility of their L2 learning and acculturation belongs to not just ESL teachers but all in the school environment.

As shall be seen in other examples of good practice, appreciation of the refugee student's own heritage, as well as reciprocity in efforts to learn about each other's language and culture alongside the majority's actually lay at the heart of effective approaches to refugee education. In initial attempts to humanise shared classrooms, Ghosn's (2013) materials development project is worthy of mention. Despite even minor differences in (Arabic) accent and culture, Palestinian refugee children had still been withdrawn while attending United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools and experienced academic difficulties. This was due, in part, to on a national curriculum that was intent on English-medium content-area instruction, and high-level language textbooks were developed exclusively for Lebanese children with potential interests in national festivals and foreign travel (Ghosn, 2013). Unsurprisingly,

together with their overworked teachers, the refugee students were later found to react positively to the alternative lower primary materials that achieved relevance with gradually increasing difficulty levels for both literacy and L2 instruction and familiar content from their immediate environments such as readily identifiable characters with Arabic names, Palestinian costumes, households and rituals (Ghosn, 2013).

In more recent models of inclusive practice, tolerance of L1 use, or more appropriately L1-support and use of multimodal storytelling techniques have become the hallmarks of plurilingual classrooms, where students from migrant or refugee backgrounds and majority peers can act as co-informants of their native languages and cultures and be guided into working towards a common goal by both their language and content-area teachers. In the British Council's project from the Lebanese context, Grappe and Ross (2019) involved refugee parents, speaking Bedouin Arabic, Kurdish or Turkmen, in the co-construction of a parent/teacher training pack, consisting of 13 awakening-to-languages activities (e.g. *What did you do today?* worksheets), Arabic translations and images for adults with limited or no L1 literacy. In this way, Syrian preschool children were enabled to compare the teacher-mediated knowledge about different cultural aspects with the parent-mediated knowledge about their home situation and share with their teacher and classmates at school (Grappe & Ross, 2019).

Minuz et al. (2020) also explained that Italian teachers provided their child readers with opportunities to explore multilingual books via the *Mamma Lingua* [Mother-tongue] project website, got them to discuss, retell and translate the stories into Italian with help from their teachers and peers and develop language awareness besides reading for pleasure. Similarly, Heathfield and Goksu's (2019) case study of YouTube storytelling performances by a class of 25 secondary pupils (14 migrants) in Hannover showed that telling and hearing stories from their home and other foreign countries allowed them to use their native and additional languages (English) in a non-threatening atmosphere and also promoted mutual understanding and respect for their unique identities. In each case, alternation between the home and school languages serves to create diverse third spaces, where the teacher and learners can jointly construct new knowledge (L2 output) based on their native resources (L1 inputs) (Makalela, 2015; Minuz et al., 2020). The use of translanguaging strategies has thus come to be regarded as a key indicator of educational equity in progressive language education (Li & Luo, 2017; Minuz et al., 2020).

A closer look at recent research on refugee education in Turkey has nonetheless manifested that participant views on major issues facing refugee learning partners were elicited almost invariantly via semi-structured interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, including elementary teachers (Bulut et al., 2018), teachers of Turkish language and literature (Alan & Alptekin, 2021), school counsellors (Bozan & Celik, 2021), headteachers from refugee-populated areas (Eren, 2019), field-researchers (Bozan & Celik, 2021), refugee students

(Bozan & Celik, 2021) and parents (Celik et al., 2021) alongside language assistants (e.g. Morali, 2018; Taskin & Erdemli, 2018) and coordinators (Bozan & Celik, 2021; Eren, 2019) from temporary education centres (TECs) and the EU-funded project on promoting integration of Syrian children into Turkish education system (PICTES). However, they could not go beyond redocumenting persistent problems related to the national curriculum, instructional materials, in-service teacher training, administrative procedures, school infrastructure and communication with refugee and other students or their parents (Celik, 2019; Celik et al., 2021; Eren, 2019).

In these studies, their greatest challenge of communicating in the local/official language also seemed to be primarily linked with psychosocial factors such as Syrian refugees' concerns about separation, exclusion and assimilation (Celik et al., 2021; Tunga et al., 2020). Yet, two other issues, top-ranking next to *their* language deficit, namely lack of appropriate L2 materials and qualified language teachers, might actually be the overlooked culprit that places the insurmountable language barrier to refugee learners' school success and integration. Furthermore, Tunga et al. (2020) have pointed out in their recent review of 25 descriptive studies that there was a considerable lapse of time between the beginning of Arabic-medium education at the now-closed TECs and enrolment of refugee children in Turkish-medium public schools. Consequently, another contributing factor could also be the much-delayed decision to teach Turkish to Syrian children because of a miscalculation that displaced Syrians would return home ten years on from the war (Tunga et al., 2020).

As an interim solution to increase access to education for an ever-growing number of refugee children, over-age students have eventually been admitted to first grade and monolingually taught the national curriculum elusive for many by mostly untrained teachers (Celik, 2019; Morali, 2018; Taskin & Erdemli, 2018). Due to absence of age-appropriate contents for their literacy and grade levels, they have been exposed to materials which were originally designed for teaching Turkish to adult international students (Bulut et al., 2018; Eren, 2019; Nimer, 2019). This in turn has caused an outcry among the teachers for removing refugee students from mainstream classes until they develop L2 proficiency (Bulut et al., 2018; Celik, 2019; Celik et al., 2021; Taskin & Erdemli, 2018). Since 2019-2020 academic year, refugee students who scored less than 60% on the Turkish proficiency exam have thus been receiving 24 hours of remedial language education besides six-hour arts and sports courses (DG NEAR, 2020). An initial evaluation of adaptation classes has still indicated that refugee learners' major problems with instructional materials and teacher competences remain unresolved (Bozan & Celik, 2021). To make matters worse, separation from their native-speaking peers have not only reduced the opportunities to use the target language for authentic communication and develop social relationships, but also increased the prevalence of disruptive behaviour in refugee-only classes and negative labelling at school (Bozan & Celik, 2021; DG NEAR, 2020).

Examination of the very few existing studies of TSL coursebooks for refugee children has also demonstrated how misconceived the adopted approach to L2 materials development could get. Irrespective of whether Yunus Emre Institute's four-book basic set for eleven-to-fifteen-year-olds (entitled, *Turkce ogreniyorum* [I am learning Turkish]), or PICTES' three-book equivalent for six-to-twelve-year-olds (entitled, *Hayat boyu Turkce* [Lifelong Turkish]) underwent teacher-evaluation still only superficially, both materials were met with disapproval due to the incompatibility of their irrelevant and outdated content with the refugee students' age and grade levels (Alan & Alptekin, 2021; Bicer & Kilic, 2017). Perhaps more interestingly, greater incorporation and positive representation of L2 (Turkish) culture were also recommended to their authors by experts on mother-tongue instruction, who clearly viewed second and foreign language learning as identical (e.g. Alan & Alptekin, 2021; Bicer & Kilic, 2017).

In essence, the education literature suggests that segregated schooling along with linguistically and culturally-inappropriate (if not actually assimilationist) materials should be more readily held responsible for refugee students' failure to learn the target language. However, teacher self-reports alone may not provide objective evidence for evaluating the efficiency of a given set of L2 materials in creating an inclusive and learning-friendly environment (ILFE) for refugee learners. For this reason, this study aimed to investigate whether and to what extent TSL and ESL reading materials, locally produced and used for refugee education in Turkey

and New Zealand, include all children with different levels of language proficiency, gender identities and cultural backgrounds by using corpus-driven methods. The following research questions were addressed:

- How do TSL reading materials for refugee learners compare with their ESL counterparts in terms of grammatical and lexical complexity?
- How do TSL reading materials for refugee learners compare with their ESL counterparts in terms of gender equity?
- How do TSL reading materials for refugee learners compare with their ESL counterparts in terms of cultural equity?

Method

In this multimethod study, where the text data was transformed into frequency and percentage distributions, comparative corpus-based analyses of grammatical and lexical complexity were conducted solely on outliers, and content analyses of verbal and nonverbal inputs from TSL and ESL reading materials were also performed for the purpose of assessing their degree of inclusivity (Morse, 2003).

Data Collection

For comparison purposes, five narratives (CEFR-A1) (entitled, *Acil* [A&E], *Kayıp bavul* [Lost luggage], *Saklambac* [Hide-and-see], *Bisiklet* [The bike], and *Her zamanki kafede* [At the usual café]) with an average of 762.2 words were selected among TSL reading materials prepared by PICTES (2021) project team for third-grade adaptation classes. As it corresponded to year 4/level 2 in the New Zealand curriculum, five thematically similar texts at gold level (entitled, *A gift for Auntie Nga*, *Breakdown*, *Always great, never late!*, *No big deal*, and *The Green Team*) with an average of 790.2 words were chosen from the Ministry of Education's *Ready-to-Read* and *Junior Journal* series (MoE, 2009). The qualitative data for gender and culture-based comparisons was therefore derived from a total of ten texts, whereas two sets of short and long-outlying texts (i.e. *Acil* [A&E] and *Her zamanki kafede* [At the usual café] vs. *A gift for Auntie Nga* and *The Green Team*) were purposively selected from TSL and ESL reading materials to comprise the corpus for grammatical and lexical complexity analyses due to the illuminative power of extreme case sampling (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis

During grammatical complexity analysis, the two sets of short and long-outlying texts were first divided into T-units (i.e. one main clause with any number of subordinate clauses), subordinate clauses (i.e. adjectival, adverbial, nominal and non-finite types) and sentences marked by full stops. Then, three complexity ratios were calculated by dividing: total number of words by total number of T-units (W/T), total number of clauses by total number of T-units (C/T) and total number of T-units by total number of sentences (T/S) to compare TSL and ESL reading materials in terms of T-unit length, subordination and coordination use respectively (Wolfe-Quintero et al., 1998). During lexical complexity analysis, four lists of verb items in total were compiled for TSL and ESL outliers. After the identification of infrequent verbs that do not appear on two different frequency lists of first 50 verbs and 2500 most common words in Turkish and English, two (type/token) lexical complexity ratios were calculated by dividing: total number of verb types by total number of verbs (VT/V) and total number of sophisticated

verb types by total number of verbs (SVT/V) to compare TSL and ESL reading materials in terms of verb variation and verb sophistication (Wolfe-Quintero et al., 1998).

In addition to comparisons against grammatical and lexical complexity measures, all verbal and nonverbal texts were subjected to qualitative and quantitative analysis to determine how gender and culturally-responsive these ten storybooks were. Following established criteria from the literature (e.g. Bag & Bayyurt, 2015; Goyal & Rose, 2020; Lee, 2014b; Lee & Chin, 2021), frequency counts were carried out for the number of: male and female characters in texts, male and female protagonists, unnamed and anonymous characters, male and female proper names, familial roles associated with men and women, occupational roles associated with men and women, male and female appearances in illustrations, and male and female-dominated images (i.e. with only men or women, and with more men or women) during the analysis of gender representations. For the comparison of their cultural contents, Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) patterns of cultural representation were employed. After the textual and visual elements referring to the learners' source cultures and their target-language culture (i.e. Turkish and English) were counted, frequencies and percentages of occurrence were tabulated appropriately. The overall percentage agreement was calculated as 93% for clause-verb identification and 94% for gender-culture identification within Miles and Huberman's (1994) acceptable range.

Results and Discussion

For the purpose of determining how closely the current materials matched TSL and ESL learners' proficiency levels, the shortest and longest texts from each corpus were subjected to grammatical and lexical analyses. Comparisons between T-unit lengths and ratios of T-unit complexity and sentence coordination revealed in Table 1 that despite having an almost equal number of words, ESL texts not only employed fewer and longer T-units ($W/T=6.49-7.41$) but they also made greater use of clause complexing ($C/T=0.20-0.22$) and coordinated sentences ($T/S=1.17-1.42$) to achieve cohesion in eight to nine-year-olds' readings. TSL texts, on the other hand, proved easier than their ESL counterparts because their T-unit lengths ($W/T=3.84-4.28$) as well as subordination ($C/T=0.03$) and coordination ($T/S=1.06-1.11$) ratios fell outside the specified range of all three measures of grammatical complexity; that is, being below the average of 6.0 words and 1.07 clauses per T-unit for the lowest levels and 1.2 T-units per sentence at all levels (Wolfe-Quintero et al., 1998). Within groups, both outliers also varied only slightly in terms of T-unit complexity and sentence coordination, thereby ensuring uniformity in grammatical complexity.

Another determinant of complexity related to the range and utility of verbs, besides repertoire size, inputted by TSL and ESL texts. Table 1 also presented the findings from comparative lexical analyses against two different type/token ratios. The initial comparison by the total number of verb items might have suggested the superiority of TSL narratives over ESL ones. However, the higher proportion of verb types to overall verbs indicated that ESL texts generated more verb types ($VT/V=0.32-0.46$) in either case, and were capable of exposing L2 learners to more varied lexical input. A further comparison by their selection of high-frequency verbs demonstrated that the materials writers paid almost equal attention to providing third-graders with the most useful vocabulary. TSL outliers covered 52-66% of first 50 verbs in the Turkish National Corpus (TNC) and 11-15% of 455 verbs listed among the most frequent 2500 words in Turkish, whereas ESL outliers covered 48-66% of first 50 verbs in the New General Service List (new-GSL) and 9.5-11% of 558 verbs listed among the most frequent 2500 words in English (Aksan et al., 2017; Brezina & Gablasova, 2015; TNC, 2022). Therefore, both

corpora displayed a similar tendency to fluctuate only mildly between 0.03-0.04 (based on a frequency list of 2500 most common words in Turkish and English) and 0.16-0.18 (based on a frequency list of 50 most common verbs in Turkish and English) sophisticated verb types per verb, while the short ESL outlier turned out to have both more verb types ($VT/V=0.46$) and more sophisticated verbs than the others ($SVT/T=0.07-0.28$). Since larger ratios on verb variation and sophistication measures are identified as indicators of greater lexical proficiency, the short ESL outlier, despite also being the most concise of all, can be claimed to embody the greatest lexical complexity (Wolfe-Quintero et al., 1998).

Table 1

Comparisons Between TSL and ESL Texts on Grammatical and Lexical Complexity Measures

| Measures | Outlying texts | TSL | | ESL | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | Shortest | Longest | Shortest | Longest |
| Words (W) | | 682 | 869 | 660 | 870 |
| Clauses (C) | | 5 | 7 | 18 | 30 |
| T-units (T) | | 159 | 226 | 89 | 134 |
| Sentences (S) | | 149 | 202 | 76 | 94 |
| W/T | | 4.28 | 3.84 | 7.41 | 6.49 |
| C/T | | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.20 | 0.22 |
| T/S | | 1.06 | 1.11 | 1.17 | 1.42 |
| Verb types (VT) | | 56 | 78 | 63 | 69 |
| Sophisticated VT (SVT ^a) | | 6 (30) | 11 (45) | 10 (39) | 10 (36) |
| Verbs (V) | | 164 | 248 | 135 | 214 |
| VT/V | | 0.34 | 0.31 | 0.46 | 0.32 |
| SVT/V | | 0.03 (0.18) | 0.04 (0.18) | 0.07 (0.28) | 0.04 (0.16) |

^aUnbracketed figures show infrequent verbs that are not listed among the most frequent 2500 words in the TNC/new-GSL. Bracketed figures show infrequent verbs that are not listed among the first 50 verbs in the TNC/new-GSL.

Previous research on the influence of different complexity measures over text difficulty has also shown that lexical complexity was a more definitive factor than syntactic complexity in estimating the comprehensibility of simplified and authentic materials for especially beginning learners, and materials providers were recommended to select appropriate readings on the basis of word frequency lists, or in other words, tune difficulty level according to their use of less or more sophisticated words rather than of shorter or longer sentences (Arya et al., 2011; Barrot, 2013; Mehrpour & Riazi, 2004; Nouri & Zerhouni, 2018). For this reason, one can conclude that both collections would benefit from extension with further readings embodying greater lexical diversity, if they were to cater for relatively more proficient readers among refugee third-graders, whose mother tongue literacy can also vary widely given adequate, limited or no

prior schooling. There is, however, another aspect of ESL materials that might result in more inclusion. Unlike text-only TSL materials, their free online texts are accompanied by audio versions, so that students with different learning styles and/or (dis)abilities can equally enjoy the stories through different mediums.

In addition to the grammar and lexicon, all verbal and nonverbal texts were examined in terms of gendered representations to ascertain whether the materials really catered to the needs of girls and boys equally. As shown in Table 2, male characters (57-58%) outnumbered female characters (42-43%) in both learning situations, and the difference was even greater when it came to hero-making, especially in TSL texts (m=76%; f=25%). A closer look at TSL texts provided that male characters with prestigious jobs (e.g. managers, doctors) engaged in occupational (e.g. having company meetings, delegating tasks), purchasing (e.g. gifting, ordering food and drinks, sponsoring family trips) and mobility (e.g. cycling, driving, flying) activities, whereas female characters were stereotyped as housebound housewives cooking, cleaning, sewing and tending, or objects of pity (e.g. six-year-old girl with a broken leg whining for mum), desire (e.g. Romanian beauty captivating her future husband at the lost property office) and ridicule (e.g. clumsy stewardess spilling cherry juice all over male senior shirt manufacturer) due to physical and psychological features potentially common to both sexes. Conversely, ESL texts tried promoting equity between fictional characters and occasionally depicted role models as humans equally skilled at domestic tasks (e.g. the boy sometimes getting her breakfast and checking up on his mother) and equipped with intellectual and moral virtues (e.g. Mr. Marlow frowning at misplaced crayons in the classroom while Gemma knowing from her brother's experience, noticing Cody's problem and helping them both with colour-blindness).

Despite equality in anonymity (m=60%; f=40%), ESL texts (m=56%; f=44%) also differed from TSL ones (m=48%; f=52%) in using more masculine than feminine names. At first glance, it might appear that TSL texts had a more even distribution of familial roles probably due to the curricular emphasis placed on the teaching of Turkish kinship terms. But all in all, women in both materials (58-83%) were more often designated as mother or wife and the primary caregiver. In line with this archaic gender role, women in TSL texts were underrepresented as people in employment (m=52%; f=48%) and assigned low-paying and/or female-stereotyped service jobs (e.g. hairdressing, seamstressing, teaching, clerking). ESL texts, on the other hand, linked female characters to a greater number (m=43%; f=57%) and variety of occupational roles (e.g. courier, model, garden centre owner). They also insinuated the increasing presence of single working mothers, who, besides breadwinning, could cope with multitasking (e.g. shopping, driving kids around, handling car issues and physical work) and get identified with extraordinariness by their male only-children. As evidenced in Table 2 by the higher concentration of female character appearances and female-dominated images (56-58%), women in ESL materials can be concluded to have better visibility than those in TSL materials (33-37%). In addition to illustrating more women than men, ESL materials cared more about equal sharing of the visual realm. Two same and mixed-gender pairs (e.g. Ara-her mother, Lucca-his grandfather, Nico-his gran, Shai-her father) were once pictured cooking together to win the culinary competition between schools. TSL materials still managed to downplay women's agency in the storyline by either removing from display, or depicting them negatively as the weaker sex, fanning oneself faintly, leaning on husband's shoulder, or pulling father's shirt even in female-dominated images.

Table 2
Comparisons Between TSL and ESL Texts on Gender Equity Measures

| Indicators | Mode ^a | | TSL | | | | ESL | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|--|
| | | | Verbal | | Visual | | Verbal | | Visual | |
| | m | f | m | f | m | f | m | f | | |
| Characters | 15 (58%) | 11 (42%) | | | 16 (57%) | 12 (43%) | | | | |
| Protagonists | 9 (76%) | 3 (25%) | | | 9 (56%) | 7 (44%) | | | | |
| Unnamed characters | 6 (60%) | 4 (40%) | | | 6 (60%) | 4 (40%) | | | | |
| Proper names | 12 (48%) | 13 (52%) | | | 10 (56%) | 8 (44%) | | | | |
| Familial roles | 59 (42%) | 81 (58%) | | | 16 (17%) | 77 (83%) | | | | |
| Occupational roles | 11 (52%) | 10 (48%) | | | 6 (43%) | 8 (57%) | | | | |
| Total character appearances | | | 33 (63%) | 19 (37%) | | | 56 (42%) | 76 (58%) | | |
| Gender-dominant images | | | 12 (67%) | 6 (33%) | | | 12 (44%) | 15 (56%) | | |

^am: male; f: female

The comparisons against gender equity measures have therefore shown that the desired balance between the genders could be achieved in neither case. Although ESL materials overall seemed to adopt a more progressive worldview more visually than verbally, they cooperated with TSL counterparts in the imposition of male supremacy mainly through use of male overpopulation, negative stereotypes and character designation by domestic and professional roles. Regardless of the culture they were produced for and by, whether western, non-western, or westernised, a plethora of learning materials for different subject areas and grade levels was similarly found to embody imbalances in linguistic and nonlinguistic inputs and criticised for reinforcing and legitimising gender inequality in the 21st century classroom, which should instead be working towards the goal of education for all (Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009; Goyal & Rose, 2020; Lee, 2014a). In three other studies, which investigated the genderedness of textual and visual content presented by primary English coursebooks locally produced in China and Turkey, disparities in female-to-male appearances, men's occupational choices and women's engagement in housework likewise continued to plague different editions, and notwithstanding small improvements in familial roles and imagery, latent sexism could still be recognised (Bag & Bayyurt, 2015; Lee, 2014b; Lee & Chin, 2021). As a result, it is not too far-fetched to predict that the gender gap will worsen, let alone close, particularly for refugee girls

with increased vulnerability to school dropout, forced marriage and gender-based violence. Consequently, modifications made to materials design and actual use should go beyond the cosmetic level. Active engagement in gender awareness raising should also be maintained across the curriculum by all stakeholders, parents, teachers, teacher educators and educational authorities.

Table 3

Comparisons Between TSL and ESL Texts on Cultural Equity Measures

| Indicators ^a | Mode | | TSL | | | | ESL | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|--|
| | | | Verbal | | Visual | | Verbal | | Visual | |
| | C2 | C1 | C2 | C1 | C2 | C1 | C2 | C1 | | |
| Cultural elements | 51 (69%) | 23 (31%) | 12 (71%) | 5 (29%) | 40 (48%) | 44 (52%) | 18 (29%) | 45 (71%) | | |

^aC2: target culture; C1: source cultures.

Ultimately, the cultural contents of TSL and ESL materials underwent comparative analysis so as to discover to what extent they included children with diverse cultural backgrounds. According to Table 3, ESL texts can be claimed to have a more pluralistic composition both verbally and visually due to the larger proportion of elements referring to the learners' own cultures (C1=52-71%). As to whose culture(s) received more focus in the multicultural classrooms of New Zealand, Maori culture, of the largest minority, predominated, and particularly, Rarotongan life was foregrounded in the narrative, *A gift for Auntie Nga*. ESL texts were also distinguished by the fact that they provided information not only on a wider range of cultural products; that is, local geography (e.g. Cook Islands, white-sand beaches), animals (e.g. hermit-crabs, shells), food (e.g. coconuts, pineapples), clothes and accessories (e.g. floral shirts, flower garlands), along with musical instruments (e.g. ukuleles), but also on cultural practices and the more implicit perspectives, such as saying *karakia*, prayers before meals, *tivaevae*, quilt-making in women's groups, and gift-giving as a show of love, honour and respect. No reference was actually made to the home (Arab) culture of Syrian refugees, but other immigrant groups were amply represented especially in *the Green Team*, where Greek, Indian, Italian, Kurdish and Samoan schoolmates presented their own traditional dishes (e.g. bhaji, palusami, spanakopita) prepared with the New Zealandian silverbeet from school garden. In an apparent effort to promote social cohesion, ESL materials also used images of ethnically mixed communities and classrooms, while they tended to represent the target-language culture elements (C2=29-48%) in the verbal mode; that is, through proverbs (e.g. place for everything, and everything in its place), riddles (e.g. When is a door not a door? When it's ajar), idioms (e.g. oldie but goodie), place names (e.g. Auckland) and sports (e.g. cricket).

For TSL materials, the reverse was true. The target-language culture elements (C2=69-71%), consisting of a full list of Istanbul's top attractions (e.g. Grand Bazaar, Hagia Sophia), popular holiday destinations (e.g. Bodrum, Marmaris), local specialties (e.g. Turkish breakfast) and the custom of tea and coffee drinking, outweighed those of the learners' source cultures (C1=29-31%). More precisely, there were cursory mentions of different nonnative groups, that is, their nationalities (e.g. Japanese), countries (e.g. Germany), place names (e.g. Ottawa). But Syrian refugees' home (Arab) culture was most stereotypically personified with the male protagonist's (e.g. Sharif Zakaria from Cairo) physicality; that is, his complexion, facial features and hair

type, standing in sharp contrast to his female counterpart (e.g. Monica from Bucharest) at Istanbul airport. This was possibly because adopting a tourist's perspective and representing culture solely in terms of more tangible and less sensitive topics such as food and travel could seem easier or even safer to materials writers and producers, and more appealing to younger readers, despite concerns about materials-induced prejudice and superficial learning (Simsek, 2018; Yuen, 2011). Independent of the type of learning context (TSL/ESL), coursebook origin (local/global), educational level (primary/tertiary) and goal-orientation (for general/specific purposes), many different L2 materials had also been reported to simply concentrate on transmitting surface knowledge of target-language culture elements and blamed for robbing increasingly diverse classrooms of opportunities to encounter new language in culturally-relevant contexts (Basal et al., 2014; Huang, 2019; Pashmforoosh & Babaii, 2015; Rai & Deng, 2016; Shin et al., 2011; Tum et al., 2012).

There is now a growing consensus that due to the centrality of cultural content to language comprehension and meaningful output production, materials should be made to contain not just the local culture, including the students' own experience, their school, family and community to relate to, reflect on and explain to others but also cultural features outside their world, from various countries in order for the learners to eventually "maintain an equal, mutually-respectful relationship" with the global community (Forman, 2014; Matsuda, 2012, p. 177; McGrath, 2002; Toledo-Sandoval, 2020). In the case of refugee learners, already struggling with multiple hardships, such as discrimination, insecurity, and poverty, integration of their native language and culture into the L2 classroom has indeed become of prime importance in lowering the affective filter and scaffolding their L2 learning. As a result, the cultural content of TSL materials needed serious expansion in terms of both depth and breadth so as to engage rather than alienate Syrian refugee students, whereas the culturally more diverse ESL materials had still room for improvement for minority representation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Corpus-based comparative analyses of grammatical and lexical complexity as well as gender and cultural equity revealed that despite both being far from achieving the ideal composition for creating an ILFE, TSL reading materials for refugee children were lagging further behind their ESL counterparts in all three respects. Both kinds of materials depended on almost uniform sets of easy-to-read narratives predominantly embodying simpler grammatical features and high-frequency words, and thus needed extension with relatively elaborate ones inputting more sophisticated verbs to accommodate mixed-ability classes. Gender disparities were institutionalised typically through male overrepresentation in hero-making, negative stereotyping, familial and occupational identification, and engagement in monetary and mobility activities, but occasionally ameliorated, in the ESL case, by reversing conventionally-gendered domestic, technical and intellectual skills in texts and images. The widest gap between TSL and ESL materials was still observed in cultural representations because the former, written from a tourist's perspective, focused on imposing superficial knowledge of target-culture elements, and conversely, the latter on ensuring relevance through greater use of elements from the students' diverse cultures.

The proposed modifications to the composition of the current materials may simply require more egalitarian choices of lexicogrammatical, gendered and cultured contents, but their merits are twofold. Increasing variety and thus ensuring relevance for all may cost L2 practitioners less effort than maintaining discipline in diverse classrooms. The longstanding strategy of differentiation can support all other students, but will probably mean the world to refugee

children, who desperately need something to hold onto amidst a sea of unknowns. In the long run, the joint effort to break language barriers can also be paid back with academic and workplace success on the part of refugees, and with social harmony and peace on the part of host countries. Cowart, Lanford, and Beatty (2011), too, pointed out that educators do know how to teach all students successfully, and in providing newcomers with appropriate instruction, they can influence a quality of life both refugee families and the American society will enjoy. In terms of such transformative power, not many learning mediums can be argued to exist comparable to the L2 teacher and textbook.

However, this study concentrated on corpus-based comparative analysis of two sets of locally produced extensive reading materials for third-grade refugee learners. Since storytelling was assumed to promote gender and cultural-awareness raising, non-fiction texts were not included in the corpus. The size of the corpus (ten narratives), language level (basic) and focus on extreme cases (short and long-outlying texts) during analyses of lexical and grammatical complexity could be listed among its other limitations. Given dire predictions about climate-forced displacement, environmental migrants may contribute to the new majority in future classrooms. Consequently, L2 practitioners as agents of change should be empowered to build community resilience through increased social cohesion between added varieties. Future researchers are finally recommended to focus on devising a guiding framework for both designing and evaluating inclusive materials, developing teachers' gender and cultural awareness, and expanding their repertoire of materials adaptation strategies and plurilingual activities.

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Sociocultural Issues Experienced by Adults Learning Maltese as a Second Language

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Abstract

The pedagogy of language has since time immemorial majored in the use of pens and other printed materials. However, there occurred a separation of the teaching culture into two major categories; the “big C” and “little c”, meaning high and popular culture. Over the years, advancements in various pedagogical techniques have made this boundary separating the two cultures thinner and thinner. It is now blurred with the result that one may not tell which teaching culture is applicable in various circumstances. The leading cause of these changes is sociocultural issues. Present-day evaluations of the humanities have caused a shift towards a broader view to accommodate anthropological and sociological approaches. This shift has also had an influence on the techniques which are used in teaching within the classroom setting. The current study focused on providing a comprehensive picture of various sociocultural problems affecting Maltese as a second language (ML2) pedagogy and the depth to which the reported sociocultural issues are significant to ML2 and any second language teaching and learning. This study investigated the challenges experienced by thirty-five ML2 adult learners. Participant interviews constituted the sole data collection tool. The participants, who came from all walks of life and spoke a variety of first language linguistic systems, including Semitic, Romance, Germanic, Slavic, Indo-European, Indo-Aryan, and Indo-Iranian, experienced challenges regarding their linguistic abilities, culture shock, personalities, memory, and the teaching method. The current study was required to investigate challenges encountered by adult learners of ML2 and to make some recommendations for improving instruction for adult learners.

Keywords: adult learners, Maltese as a second language, second language acquisition, social constructivism, sociocultural theory, sociocultural issues

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a complex process and is associated with different theories attempting to explain the manner in which people acquire a second language (L2). It is worth noting that historically there has been a change in the education paradigm from cognitivism to constructivism and socioculturalism. Consequently, SLA is experiencing a significant drift parallel to the sociocultural trend. The pedagogy approach is moving towards a social experience, an active learner who is engaged in his learning, exploration, and reading ahead of subject experience and knowledge. Therefore, there is a need to have a better understanding of sociocultural issues which affect L2 learning and teaching (Tawfiq, 2020).

An L2 learner's interlanguage is perceived to have other influential factors. It is observed that SLA depends greatly on the communicative approach and the private environment. L2 learning in a place where L2 is often spoken by the native speakers, or amid the language's own culture is viewed as a significant boost (Cook, 2016), such as was the case of the current study participants. In some cases, learners may be highly motivated and determined to learn the L2. It makes the teacher's job easier since the student takes the time to study and understand more about the L2 culture. Yet in every situation where learning an L2 is required for survival in society, school, and the workplace, there are students who are disinterested in knowing the language and its culture. Such a situation may cause the teacher to use a combination of pedagogical practices to ensure that SLA is efficient.

In the modern constructivist approach, teaching shifts its focus to task-based activities from isolated practices (Waqas Khan, Rizvi, Iqbal and Asghar, 2020). Learners are exposed to more opportunities to put into practice what they learn within the classroom environment in various assigned tasks. Socio-constructivism and the communicative language teaching approach are now taking the lead and overshadowing direct grammar instruction, which was dominant in previous years (Idaresit Akpan et al., 2020; Żammit, 2021a). The socio-constructivist approach is based on the idea that SLA is a social practice through cultural and social interactions.

Problem and Purpose Statement

The inclusion of Malta in the European Union (EU) in 2004 raised the status of Maltese to one of the EU's official languages. Since 1934, Maltese has been the official language in Malta together with English. Therefore, competence in the Maltese language, Malta's national language since Independence Day (September 21, 1964), is essential for expats planning to reside and integrate in Malta or participate in trading activities.

Many industries in Malta have a substantial proportion of foreign workers. They include the internet gaming (iGaming) industry, the restaurant industry, financial services, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, the hospitality sector, and the construction and other manual sectors (Micallef, 2018). The unattractiveness of manual jobs to Maltese workers indicates that the demand for foreign workers will persist, and their communication competence in the national language will be crucial to effective communication (Micallef, 2018). The requirement that foreigners speak Maltese is also crucial for the integration of new immigrants seeking job opportunities in Malta.

About 97 per cent of Malta's 460,000-strong population speaks Maltese, and 89 per cent, 56 per cent, and 11 per cent can hold a conversation in English, Italian, and French, respectively (Quinn, 2019). While the recognition of Maltese as an official language in the EU and in Malta represents progress, it necessitates the learning of Maltese as a second language (ML2) by non-Maltese-speaking nationals residing in Malta. The Maltese government has taken appropriate

steps to address the challenge as it requires communication competence for EU nationals working in Malta under its Directive 2005/36/EU, Article 53. The directive was necessary as Malta's accession to the EU opened up opportunities for EU nationals, third party nationals, and Maltese to exploit with respect to economic development and prosperity. The government had to adjust its policy framework to create conditions that encourage effective communication.

A white paper in 2019 proposed mandatory Maltese in all schools that follow the national curriculum, requiring students to be proficient in Maltese and to acquire ML2 (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012). The national policy paper established a framework for testing and enhancing students' Maltese proficiency from preschool to secondary education. Moreover, the document argues for additional incentives to encourage migrant parents/adults to learn Maltese. While one may criticise the Maltese approach as an act of nationalism, communication competence in Maltese became necessary at the moment Malta became an EU member. Delays in requiring communication competence in Maltese would affect the country's economic well-being especially for the sectors that rely on foreign workers. The government anticipated demand for courses in ML2 as expats wishing to work, live and integrate in Malta would need to be competent in using the country's national language (Żammit, 2021b).

The growing demand for ML2 lessons resulted in the introduction of two programmes to the adult lifelong learning evening classes, namely the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) Level 1: A1 and A2 in ML2 and the MQF Level 2: B1 and B2 in ML2. In 2019, the government launched the 'I Belong' programme, which aims to improve integration for foreigners from non-EU member countries through Maltese language and culture lessons (Cassar, 2019). While the demand for Maltese has been increasing, linguistic research has not kept pace. There has been no large-scale research investigating ML2 acquisition. Consequently, the present study contributes to the knowledge base regarding ML2 acquisition of adult learners.

The Study Objectives

The study aims to explore specific difficulties that adult learners experience in learning ML2. Through this research the researcher would like to determine the sociocultural factors that could be challenging for L2 adult learners.

The present study contribution to knowledge is based on the following:

1. It confirms the applicability of sociocultural theory (SCT) to SLA.
2. It provides useful information for L2 course design, textbook production, syllabus planning and pedagogy, as it explores the difficulties that adult learners experience when learning ML2 which could be applied to any other L2.

This study will first review the literature on sociocultural theories. Subsequently, the techniques used to conduct this study will be identified. Next the findings and discussion, and finally the conclusion, which will include the study limitations and recommendations for future research will be provided.

Research Question

This study addresses the following primary research question:

What kind of difficulties are encountered by adult learners when acquiring Maltese as a second language?

Literature Review

Second Language Acquisition as a Sociocultural Phenomenon

SLA is a complex process and is associated with different theories attempting to explain the manner in which people acquire an L2. Hummel (2020) acknowledges that SLA is a challenging process as a learner can feel alienated from L2 and its embedded culture. L2 learners experience the challenge of avoiding errors when using certain aspects of their first language (L1) in L2 (Ibrahim, 2019). Instead, learners using their L1 to understand an L2 can make language mistakes due to incompatibilities between L1 and L2 (Nor & Rashid, 2018). The interference of L1 makes SLA a challenging endeavour for some learners. Alternatively, L1 can be an enabler in the SLA process. The present study will explore whether learners perceive their L1 as an inhibitor or enabler in the SLA process.

Frustrations associated with SLA are not limited to classroom settings as some L2 learners struggle to communicate effectively with the native speakers of the L2 they are learning. The societal expectations of the settings in which SLA occurs can frustrate a learner who lacks the competence to meet those expectations (Hummel, 2020). While tolerance for L2 learners by the native speakers is a crucial source of motivation, a learner's tendency to communicate flawlessly in their L1 affects their attitudes towards an L2. These adult learners can grow frustrated with their struggle and inability to gain L2 competence similar to their L1 aptitude (Karousou & Nerantzaki, 2020).

Differences in teaching materials and strategies can contribute to the irritations L2 learners experience. Hummel (2020) indicated that there are differences in teaching strategies and materials in L1 and L2 settings. An individual's performance sometimes depends on the extent to which the teaching methodology is in sync with a learner's learning preferences (Fabriz, Mendzheritskaya & Stehle, 2021). Norris, Davis and Timpe-Laughlin (2017) have argued that a theory-based approach is associated with a better understanding of SLA. Therefore, L2 educators should appreciate the role of sociocultural theory (SCT) in the implementation of effective teaching and learning strategies (Feryok, 2017). The present study is based on SCT as it is one of the concepts promoting comprehensive understanding of the SLA process (Fabriz, et al., 2021).

The notion that SLA is a phenomenon that occurs solely in the learner's head has been challenged by cognitivists as they believe that a learner's sociocultural setting plays a crucial role in SLA. SCT indicates that language learning is a socially constructed process (Makhdoumi & Zoghi, 2017). Pathan, Memon, R.A., Memon, S., Khoso and Bux (2018) indicated that SCT focuses on the things that learners learn and their solutions to the challenges they experience. The authors propose that it has made a significant contribution to the field of learning and teaching languages.

The SCT concept regards participation in socially situated activities as crucial to SLA. The theory's influence is not limited to practice in education as it is also applicable to research on SLA (Pathan et al., 2018). Research studies based on SCT have been conducted and demonstrate the utility of the theory and identify opportunities for improvement (Ohta, 2017). Researchers and practitioners in the SLA field have demonstrated the role of symbolic

mediation in SLA and education. The current study seeks to understand the sociocultural needs of ML2 learners and inform the development of appropriate teaching and learning strategies.

Teaching strategies that attend to the needs of learners are crucial to SLA as SCT identifies the importance of social and cultural interactions in SLA. Castrillón (2017) encouraged teachers to familiarise themselves with the experiences of their learners to initiate the process of developing and implementing appropriate teaching approaches. Awareness of learners' experiences can give teachers insight into learners' zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky's notion of ZPD is that what a child can do today with the help of an adult, the same child could complete later as an independent learner. Therefore, ZPD enables learners to assemble relevant learning materials (Castrillón, 2017). Teachers are recommended to search for input that encourages learners to practise because behaviour is associated with better learning outcomes. They should be creative to draw the best out of previously implemented materials (Castrillón, 2017). Castrillón (2017) stated that high-quality materials can be meaningless if they fail to contribute to the development of learners' ZPD and encourage interaction. Teachers are advised to use materials, artefacts, and activities which catalyse higher mental processes for learners to understand concepts. Integration of peer work in the learning process is crucial to development as learners share insight and strategies they use to achieve academic goals. It creates opportunities for learners to solve challenges they experience collaboratively (Castrillón, 2017). Akinyemi, Rembe, Shumba and Adewumi (2019) have argued that collaborative pair work creates conditions in which peers offer mutual assistance. Their interactions are opportunities for learners to offer feedback that facilitates the development of specific aspects of language.

Teachers' creative problem-solving is crucial to SLA learners, as teaching strategies and materials should address the learners' needs. Albaiz (2016) indicated that teachers are urged to fashion tools which boost the learning process and eliminate potential barriers. Teachers can use various means to encourage learners to learn an L2. According to Castrillón (2017), teachers can facilitate SLA through the administration of challenging assignments, which learners should attempt individually. Teachers are suggested to use the individual assignments to assess learners' progress and maintain high performance expectations (Castrillón, 2017). A teacher should always strive to create opportunities for learners to practise language and generate appropriate feedback. Challenging tasks can facilitate learning as teachers can use assessment results as the basis for offering targeted feedback and interventions to help learners acquire relevant language skills and competences.

While the current study does not dwell on the learners' culture, it provides crucial information on learning ML2, which teachers can use to assist learners. Kapur (2015) argued that knowing learners' needs enables researchers and educators to design programmes which promote the creation of learning environments that encourage the realization of the desired outcomes. According to Kapur (2015), minimally structured problem-based learning rarely results in desirable outcomes. Challenging input has been demonstrated to have positive effects on learners who exhibit high cognitive functions (Castrillón, 2017). Tasks which encourage learners to use the available tools to mediate their performance are crucial to optimal performance (Storch, 2017). While L1 is a tool that learners use to develop their L2, the extent to which L1 serves the needs of L2 learners remains inconclusive (Storch, 2017). Hamidi and Bagherzadeh (2018) acknowledged that the consideration of L1 and L2 as mediational resources does not necessarily indicate the utility of L1 in SLA as it can lead to either positive or negative outcomes. The argument indicates that L1 can be an enabler or a barrier to SLA.

Therefore, educators must determine the instances in which they encourage the use of an L1 to aid SLA.

SCT emphasises the need for assistance that suits a learner's potential abilities. Nava and Pedrazzini (2018) have identified teachers' feedback as crucial input in SLA. They insist that an educator's feedback should stimulate learning as learners progress in SLA. They emphasised the role of interaction in SLA and the need for teachers to offer feedback whenever necessary. Corrective feedback, for example, is crucial to SLA as it attends to an individual learner's specific needs (Nava & Pedrazzini, 2018). On the basis of SCT, corrective feedback should consider a learner's current and potential level of performance (Storch, 2017). It should be responsive to a learner's indicators of SLA (Storch, 2017). However, Storch (2017) cautioned against providing the same corrective feedback to all learners as this technique might hinder SLA because not everyone learns in the same way and at the same rate.

Exposing learners to the native speakers' L2 culture is an approach that has been associated with increased use of L2. In their study, Chen and Yang (2017) indicated that teaching L2 learners the culture of English native speakers was associated with active participation in communication and enhanced the learners' speaking skills. Educators are advised to identify and use culturally relevant books in bilingual classrooms (Rodríguez, 2014). Books facilitate learning about an L2 culture for learners to identify with characters. While the present study does not dwell on the influence of culturally sensitive materials in the teaching and learning of Maltese, the participants come from different backgrounds. In this sense, culturally sensitive books could influence their learning of ML2. Rodríguez (2014) has argued that culture-relevant books motivate learners to learn a new language as the learners can identify with the realities portrayed. In this case, an emergent question the present study attempts to answer is whether the teaching and learning materials influence learning or whether culture representativeness influences ML2 learning.

Cultural representativeness of teaching and learning materials is relevant as SCT views L2 learning as a socially and culturally situated process. SCT postulates that learning and cognitive development are consequences of social interactions (Banković, 2015). A teacher is encouraged to investigate the learners' needs to design teaching strategies and gather relevant materials. Herrera (2016) encouraged L2 educators to invest time in learning the learners' strengths and weaknesses to develop culturally appropriate teaching materials. Herrera (2016) referred to the approach as biography-driven teaching as a teacher takes time to learn about a learner before designing classroom materials to use in L2 teaching. It involves an exploration of learners' sociocultural, linguistic, cognitive, and academic dimensions of culturally and linguistically diverse learners' biographies to gather knowledge on the manner in which learners use their L1 and L2, their way of acquiring knowledge, and their participation level in activities where L2 is the language of communication (Herrera, 2016). Teachers have the responsibility of gathering information on the learners' experiences regarding their use of L1 and L2. Such information allows teachers to develop culturally responsive teaching and learning materials. Teachers are encouraged to create environments in which learners appreciate that their culture-bound interpretations are valuable and respected in the classroom. These arguments indicate that teaching must be learner-centred for learners and instructors to achieve their goals.

Collaborative dialogue is crucial in SLA. Ammar and Hassan (2018) indicated that collaborative dialogue involves reflection on and talking about languaging that facilitates problem-solving and knowledge building. Collaborative dialogue is an opportunity for learners

to refine their knowledge or acquire deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Swain, Kinnear and Steinman, 2015). It facilitates SLA as learners have opportunities to support each other in solving linguistic problems regardless of their L2 abilities (Swain et al., 2015). Collaborative dialogue facilitates learning even when the interacting learners are novices. Novices become experts in creating linguistic forms once they embrace the art of solving problems collectively (Swain et al., 2015). The experiences of the learners in the present study will be useful in determining whether they use collaborative dialogue to promote their ML2 learning.

Method

The current study's goal was to determine the participants' experiences in ML2 acquisition. A review of the methodology and its elements is crucial for justifying its selection for this study and for demonstrating its role in answering the research question effectively.

This research included 35 international participants ranging in age from 19 to 74 years old and coming from various walks of life. They spoke diverse L1 language systems, including Semitic, Romance, Germanic, Slavic, Indo-European, Indo-Aryan, and Indo-Iranian. There were two doctors, three nurses, two hairdressers, two salespersons, one chef, three receptionists, two iGaming company managers, three builders, two plumbers, three electricians, two students, five housewives, three teachers, and two nannies. They were learning Maltese for various reasons, including finding employment, helping their children with their studies, communicating with workmates, feeling a sense of belonging in Malta, understanding and communicating with domestic workers such as plumbers, electricians, and builders, communicating with Maltese neighbours and friends, farmers, and salespeople, and showing respect for the country that was hosting them. They were attending ML2 Level B1 evening classes after passing their ML2 speaking, reading, writing, and listening tests in levels A1 and A2.

First, the researcher acquired ethical authorization from the University of Malta's Faculty Research Ethics Committee. As she knew four teachers who taught the participants, with their assistance, the researcher reached the participants via email, whereby the researcher explained the study, in particular, that there were no expected risks or inconveniences and that they could refuse to answer any questions and still remain in the study, or they could withdraw their participation from the study without giving any reasons. Each participant understood the purpose of the study and afterwards agreed to participate.

Researchers usually choose a qualitative approach in exploratory situations as they seek to promote an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Teddlie & Tashakorri, 2012). In the present study, a qualitative approach was employed to understand the participants' experiences in learning ML2. One-on-one interviews were conducted as the data collection tools.

Interviews were administered for a deeper understanding of the 35 ML2 learners' attitudes, perspectives, and learning difficulties while learning ML2. Each interview lasted roughly thirty minutes. The thirty-five interviews were completed in six days (three hours each day). Interviews were held online via Zoom. The interview guidelines consisted of the following five open-ended questions exploring the study's primary themes:

1. Do you learn languages just like other subjects?
2. Do you learn Maltese like other languages?
3. Do you prefer learning Maltese at the lifelong learning centre or on your own?

4. What is your main problem in learning Maltese?
5. What is your opinion about the best way to learn Maltese?

The interviews focused on the participants' challenges when learning ML2 and the learners' learning process. The researcher adopted open-ended questions to allow the participants to express themselves without the restrictions associated with closed-ended questions (Singer & Couper, 2017). The researcher used the NVivo software programme to analyse the interviews and categorise the interviews into themes (Zamawe, 2015). This qualitative approach promoted the data collection that would encourage an in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon and answer the study's research question: *What kinds of difficulties are encountered by adult L2 learners when acquiring Maltese?*

Findings and Discussion

The Challenges the Learners Experienced when Learning Maltese

In this study, the 35 participants experienced various challenges while learning ML2. The challenges included lack of exposure to Maltese, as some learners spend their four-month summer vacation in their home countries, culture shock, loss of memory due to ageing, lack of appropriate and timely feedback or correction from Maltese speakers, lack of motivation to learn ML2, the teaching methodologies, and the learners' different learning styles.

The Distinctiveness of Learning Languages

The thirty-five participants stated that learning Maltese was challenging and not similar to other forms of learning. Unlike in the case of learning other skills, such as swimming or riding a bicycle, the participants insisted that one could forget an L2. They attributed the experience to the need for continuous exposure to the L2. The response of one participant reveals the difference between learning other skills, such as braiding and language.

Take, for example, braiding our own hair. When I was young, my mum taught me how to braid my own hair. Due to hair extensions, I stopped braiding my hair. Now, after more than 15 years of not braiding my hair, I started to braid my daughter's hair, and it's as if I have never stopped braiding. With languages, it is not the same. If I do not practise Maltese, I know that I am going to forget it; just as I am forgetting the Itsekiri language, because I am not practising it.

(Nigerian housewife)

The Nigerian housewife's experiences with practical and language skills indicate that learning an L2 is a demanding process that requires active engagement in activities and situations which exposes the L2 to the group. The Nigerian housewife's account demonstrates that practice is necessary and crucial to SLA. This finding reinforces SCT's perspective that collaborative dialogue is crucial in SLA (Mahbube, Mansoor, Saeed, 2021). Therefore, ML2 learners need opportunities to practise their language skills beyond the classroom assignments.

Going abroad for several months or being sick and not attending ML2 classes for more than three months were the primary reasons that the participants identified as a barrier to the process of developing Maltese language competence. Such interruptions affect the learners' exposure to ML2. They deny them opportunities to communicate with L1 speakers to develop their communicative competence (Shona, 2019). A learner summarised her experience as follows:

Due to my job, I have travelled to far-away countries during summer, and I was too busy. I have talked a lot in Italian and English. I have to admit that I did not have any chance to speak or read in Maltese, and I did not study at all.

(Czech doctor)

The Uniqueness of Learning Maltese

While all participants indicated that learning Maltese was not similar to learning other languages, the Arabic L1 speakers did not find the process unique. The non-Arabic participants' expressions have pedagogical implications as they perceive that learning Maltese is different from other languages due to the approach teachers take when teaching Maltese. A participant's response illustrates this argument clearly.

When I was learning Arabic, we learnt the present tense before the past tense, like how we learn the other European languages. But when I am learning Maltese, I am taught the past tense before the present tense because of the *mamma* (like Arabic, the basic verb in Maltese is in the past tense instead of the infinitive). Why don't they teach us the present tense first in Maltese and then the past, like how Arabic teachers taught me Arabic?

(German teacher)

The learner's experiences in the extract above reinforce the importance of a biography-driven approach to teaching. Herrera (2016) indicated that a biography-driven approach is a framework for the development of culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers are advised to take time to know and understand the needs of their learners holistically (Herrera, 2016). The approach involves the exploration of a learner's strengths, weakness, interests, use of L1 and L2, and the ways they learn (Herrera, 2016). In the case of the German teacher above, educators did not pay attention to her experiences in L2 settings. They did not consider how her previous L2 sessions were taught to develop teaching approaches and gather materials relevant to her needs. SCT indicates that learners from different backgrounds cannot have a similar way of acquiring knowledge. Learners' experiences and exposures influence the manner in which they acquire new knowledge. Teachers must attune their teaching strategies to L2 learners' needs to reduce the inhibiting role of culture on SLA.

The German teacher's experiences in learning Arabic, Maltese, and other European languages reinforce the notion that L1 and L2 are important mediational resources as postulated by SCT. In this regard, L1 can enable or hinder SLA due to similarities and differences in grammar. Storch (2017) acknowledges that an L1 can be a crucial resource in languaging. Furthermore, Bingjun (2013) indicates that L1 can exert beneficial as well as damaging effects on SLA. Anticipating and planning for potential grammar-specific challenges is necessary as some learners are bound to struggle in L2 settings due to their previous experiences of learning other languages. However, teachers do not always control when a student uses L1 to assist in learning L2.

Implicit versus Explicit Learning

The different learning styles expressed by learners in this study indicated that they experience the learning process differently. Learners who preferred to learn ML2 implicitly, that is by being unaware that they are learning (Tavakoli, 2018), found learning ML2 to be fun and exciting as they enjoyed reading Maltese books and newspapers, understood Maltese drama

and news on TV, comprehended and sang Maltese songs, communicated with Maltese “beautiful and friendly people” (Venezuelan receptionist), and also learned from their peers (Akinyemi et al., 2019). Their preference for implicit learning reinforces the notion that social context contributes to SLA (Tavakoli, 2018). The following participant expressed his successful implicit learning even though sometimes he was disappointed with the Maltese speakers’ lack of feedback or answering him in English or Italian:

Since I live in Ħaż-Żebbuġ village and own a large home overlooking the fields, I was able to learn Maltese pretty effectively, especially when compared to my colleagues in the Maltese class. Many Maltese people, including fishermen, tailors, farmers, shoemakers, builders, plumbers, salesgirls, electricians, and gardeners, appreciate speaking Maltese to me. I am disappointed that they do not correct any errors I may make when speaking Maltese. I always express my dissatisfaction when they respond to me in English or Italian.

(Italian chef)

On the other hand, the learners who preferred explicit to implicit learning invested in buying textbooks and private tuition and memorised Maltese words and grammar rules. They found the learning process boring and considered the ML2 learning process to be a commitment and duty. Therefore, those learning ML2 implicitly enjoyed the ML2 learning process more than the explicit learners.

Culture Shock

Culture shock was one of the major issues affecting some learners’ ability to acquire and understand Maltese. The difference between a learner’s culture and Maltese culture was a crucial determinant of the learners’ experiences. For example, during his interview, a learner revealed how culture shock affected his ML2 learning process.

When I first came to Malta five years ago, I really had a culture shock. The Maltese are typical Mediterranean, very nice and friendly and quite relaxed and laid back. They really love food, and they eat large portions—and in fact many of them are overweight. Of course, since they are driving to work, there are lots of cars, and you rarely see Maltese people biking. As I am working here and my children are going to school here, I decided to learn Maltese, even though I do not see myself living here for good and Maltese is a very hard language to learn. Although Malta is so small, it is quite cosmopolitan, and I meet people from so many different places in the world. Many Swedes are coming here; there is a Swedish community here and we meet quite often. I think that Malta attracts many entrepreneurs because of the business-friendly environment, good weather, taxation, and low cost of living.

(Swedish iGaming manager)

The Swedish iGaming manager’s account of his experience in Malta reveals the cultural challenges he encountered in Malta and potential reasons for learning Maltese. Concentrating on the culture shock issue, the Swedish iGaming manager’s experience shows that differences in L1 and L2 cultures could be potential barriers to SLA. In this case, the Swedish iGaming manager has to unlearn his perceptions of the Maltese people to have meaningful experiences through interaction and engagement in sociocultural events. It calls for deliberate teaching strategies that encourage learners to value the cultural differences of an L2 culture and their way of life. Su (2012) has emphasised the importance of introducing learners to situations that

challenge their learned perspectives to initiate their interest in the L2 culture. The Swedish iGaming manager's experiences indicate that cultural projects are crucial to encouraging adaptation to the L2 culture. The experiences of the Swedish iGaming manager also indicate that the perception that studying abroad offers the best opportunities for one to develop their L2. This is in line with the findings of Yang and Kim (2011) in the sense that learners can face situations that can alter their initial ambitions to learn an L2. The Swedish iGaming manager's claim that there is a large Swedish community in Malta and that they meet often can alter his ambition to learn Maltese unless other motivations are superior.

Another undesirable experience of the ML2 learners is the issue of forgetting learned concepts of their L2 and surprisingly, even of their L1. The phenomenon of losing L1 lexical competence has been demonstrated to be common among adults learning an L2 (Chunpeng & Hee-Don, 2017). Moreover, in this study, ML2 adult learners reported that they struggled to find the best strategies to use in learning ML2 verb conjugations. Some learners attributed their struggles to learning verb conjugations to ageing. Learners who attributed their struggles to declining memories indicated that their memories were excellent in childhood and adolescence. This confirms the maturation hypothesis theory, which generalises that certain actions and mechanisms, such as language learning, are innate but are not present when the necessary organs and neural networks have developed (Muñoz-Luna, 2013). While there are sociocultural strategies that enhance the learners' memories, some participants in the current study did not realise desirable outcomes following their exposure to such approaches as rote learning. One learner indicated that effective rote learning did not help them improve their Maltese as they could not remember the learned concepts.

If I do a lot of drilling, let's say, on verb conjugations, and I am really good at putting verbs into the past tense, that doesn't mean that I can apply what I've learnt in a conversation with a Maltese, or that I am going to use the past tense appropriately. I have memory problems, and my memory is getting worse as I grow older!

(Spanish nanny)

The Spanish nanny's experiences in learning ML2 indicate that age is a crucial determinant of the effectiveness of the teaching and learning strategies employed in SLA. The findings reveal the limitations of strategies, educators use to enhance the motivation of L2 adult learners. The strategies believed to enhance learners' motivation in such studies as that of Muñoz-Luna (2013) might not be applicable in situations where a learner's memory fails them in their L2 endeavours. Therefore, future research should consider age-specific motivations to contribute to the literature on the strategies that enhance an L2 learner's motivation.

Limitations and Recommendations

The evidence presented in this study should be interpreted cautiously due to the limitations of the methodology. While qualitative studies ensure in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, they rely on narrated experiences. It is difficult to ascertain the credibility of the findings in this study due to recall bias. The possibility of oversimplification of the phenomenon is another limitation of the study.

Consequently, future research should consider a mixed-methods approach to advance knowledge on the difficulties that adult learners experience in learning ML2. A mixed-method approach can advance the contribution of the present study to the field of SCT in SLA as it will

promote the collection of qualitative and quantitative data to inform practice and further research.

The learners' experiences as expressed in this study indicate that teachers and learners contribute to the SLA process. Future researchers should consider investigating the question in this study from teachers' perspectives. Such studies are crucial to enriching evidence on the sociocultural challenges that ML2 learners experience within and outside the classroom setting. A study which uses teachers as respondents will be crucial to identifying their role in the struggles of ML2 learners as well as solutions.

Conclusion

The study under consideration investigated the challenges that adult learners experience in learning ML2 and included some recommendations for improving instruction for L2 adult learners. While the study did not focus on the role of culture in the acquisition of Maltese, the responses from participants indicate that exposure to the L2 culture is crucial to learning ML2. The importance of exposure to the target country's culture and social practices has been demonstrated by learners who lacked opportunities for languaging. Therefore, educators in SLA settings are encouraged to use culturally responsive teaching and learning strategies to facilitate the learners' transition from their cultures to the culture of the native speakers of L2.

The study also indicates that learners' learning styles affect their experiences when learning ML2. The implicit learners perceived the process as enjoyable as they learned through participation in social activities. Their engagement with Maltese speakers created opportunities for using the language and learning the manner in which certain phrases are used. On the other hand, the explicit learners found learning ML2 boring. They had to invest their time and resources in studying from books, memorising Maltese words and grammar rules, and paying for private tuition. The learning styles reveal variation in learners' needs and indicate that educators should not use the same approach to teaching ML2. They should appreciate that learners prefer teaching and learning materials/affordances which suit their needs.

The study shows that ML2 acquisition is a dynamic learning process that requires input which challenges learners to engage themselves in social activities. There were instances in which some learners despair as they struggled to communicate with Maltese speakers fluently. The learners' struggles in learning and using Maltese reinforce the importance of instruction that addresses the learners' needs. Teachers need to consider every learner's experiences when developing teaching strategies to use in the delivery of instruction. The activities included in the learning process should complement the teachers' and learners' efforts in teaching and learning Maltese respectively.

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The GoldList Notebook Method: A Study on L2 Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract

Vocabulary knowledge is of paramount importance when learning a second language. It requires effective and practical classroom vocabulary learning methods for long-term acquisition. Specific learning aspects helping the learner remember vocabulary such as spaced repetition and retrieval practice have shown efficacy but are often disconnected from practical in-class methods that can be used repeatedly. This study looked at data from 74 university students in Japan studying English vocabulary with the GoldList Notebook Method, which incorporates spaced learning and retrieval practice. The study was conducted over a nine-week period and consisted of a pre-test of target L2 idioms, a lesson teaching the idioms, the implementation of the GoldList Notebook Method, and a post-test on the target idioms. The data collected were analyzed through fixed effects with a generalized linear model in R version 4.0.3 and R Studio 1.2.5. In addition to quantitative data collected through the pre- and post-tests, qualitative observational data was compiled on the use of the GoldList Notebook Method in the classroom. The findings showed efficacy in using the method and found particular merit to spaced learning over two-week intervals. The study further addresses problems teachers may face implementing the method in the classroom and possible ways to alleviate the issues.

Keywords: desirable difficulties, L2 vocabulary, retrieval, spacing

The learning of a foreign language requires acquisition of many vocabulary words in the target language whether the learner is a beginner learning commonly used words or more advanced and learning specialized terms. With the advent of mobile applications such as Duolingo and Anki, vocabulary learning using pen-to-paper and notebooks has become less common. These applications can automatically provide spaced repetition based upon the user's correct or incorrect responses identifying target vocabulary in a second language, henceforth referred to as L2. While they are commonly used for test-prep in memorizing of vocabulary, they often lack the context of target terms or the tactile connection in activities from pen-to-paper use. Furthermore, for learners who go beyond the dabbling stage of language learning, there is a need for a process requiring sufficient exposure and review of target L2 vocabulary (Nation, 2008; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). Additionally, the form and timing the L2 vocabulary exposure comes in is important. In Japan, students from middle school through university often study with the external primary purpose of passing tests such as school entrance exams. This often produces less than effective study habits for long-term retention and future use of L2 vocabulary in new learning, known as knowledge transfer. This focus on test-performance leads to use of methods that are less effective in long-term retention of L2 vocabulary.

The focus on test performance is described by Soderstrom and Bjork (2015) where *performance* is defined as “the temporary fluctuations in behavior or knowledge that can be observed and measured during or immediately after the acquisition process.” (p.1) In comparison with performance, *learning* is the relatively permanent changes in knowledge where the knowledge acquired can be transferred to new learning (Soderstrom & Bjork, 2015). The aim of L2 vocabulary acquisition in the classroom should be the promotion of learning expressed as long-term retention over short-term performance. Desirable difficulties have been shown to help in learning over performance (e.g., Bjork, 1994; Bjork & Bjork, 2011; Brown, Roediger, & McDaniel, 2014; Persellin & Daniels, 2018). Desirable difficulties are activities or situations which increase the difficulty of a task initially. This difficulty slows the learning process down, requires increased focus, and often leads to less effective short-term performance results. Conversely, Ekuni, Vaz and Bueno (2011) explain that the increased difficulty can lead to better long-term recall and transfer ability, hence becoming desirable because the studying done was at a deeper processing level. It is important the difficulty be “desirable” and not so challenging the learner is unable to process the material or lose motivation to study. Two desirable difficulties commonly used in paper flashcards and mobile applications are spaced repetition and retrieval practice. Both of which are core aspects of an L2 vocabulary learning method known as The GoldList Notebook Method. Spaced repetition – repetition that has pre-set spaced time intervals where content, such as L2 vocabulary, is not reviewed until the next spaced interval – has been shown to increase long-term recall (Didau, 2015). Retrieval practice is an activity requiring the learner to retrieve material from memory. Spaced repetition and retrieval practice play upon one another as will be explained in more detail in the literature review section.

The fundamental concern of this paper is to explore a method of studying L2 vocabulary known as the GoldList Notebook Method among Japanese English language learners (ELLs) at university and its effect on the long-term retention of L2 vocabulary. The method incorporates spaced vocabulary recall practice through pen and paper rather than computer-based applications. Specifics on the rationale behind the GoldList Method are provided in the methodology section. The article reports on a study with the aim of identifying aspects of spacing out learning and retrieval practice in how they may enhance the long-term retention of L2 vocabulary among ELLs. While the focal point of the study is on university L2 learners in Japan, the GoldList Notebook Method itself may be incorporated into other classroom settings

with modifications. The modifications needed for all settings is beyond the scope of this article. Therefore, the article and study is limited to the EFL university classroom in Japan.

The GoldList Notebook Method incorporates retrieval and spacing desirable difficulties in the distillation process, where the learner attempts to recall the meaning of the vocabulary from memory. The study looks to answer whether the implementation of the GoldList Method as a supplement to a vocabulary lesson shows efficacy in increasing recall of vocabulary versus the vocabulary lesson alone. The study collected data from 74 first-year university students learning English at the Common European Framework (CEFR) B1 to B2 level. It looked at the merits of using the GoldList Notebook Method in learning L2 vocabulary in the form of idioms in a classroom and a variety of different spaced time-periods to glean insights to report to the teaching community. The paper first reviews the literature related to spacing and retrieval desirable difficulties in L2 learning and the pedagogical aspects of the GoldList Notebook Method. It then describes the methodology of the study, followed by a presentation of the findings and discussion before drawing conclusions and implications for teachers and learners of L2 vocabulary.

Literature Review

The role of desirable difficulties in L2 vocabulary acquisition has an established track record in effectively improving retention (Bjork & Kroll, 2015; Brown, Roediger & McDaniel, 2014; Didau, 2015). At the heart of the difference between performance and longer-term learning, is the difference between blocked practice and spacing out studying. Ebbinghaus (1885) as described in Didau (2015) illustrated there is a precipitous decline in what we remember soon after studying in the absence of time between review sessions. This lack of time is referred as blocked practice and is commonly used when cramming before a test and studying in a single block of time. In blocked practice, short-term performance is improved, hence the use of cramming. In spaced studying, short-term performance may be negatively affected, but longer-term learning is enhanced (Bjork, 1994; Glenberg, 1977; Kornell & Bjork, 2008; Randal, 2007; Rohrer, 2009). Bjork and Bjork (2011) explain the reason for the spacing effect as being the result of forgetting between study sessions and the need to subsequently review or relearn material leading to stronger connections to the target material. The active struggle of recalling material after forgetting it, is where the retrieval role comes in and is argued by Bjork (1975) that this process of forgetting and relearning through retrieval enables the learner to recall information more reliably in the future. The GoldList Notebook Method incorporates spacing to ensure against blocked practice by the learner. It also includes retrieval tasks following the spaced time away from the target vocabulary.

While there is much support for extrinsic activities such as retrieval in learning L2 vocabulary, there is another view that argues input through listening and reading alone are more effective. Krashen (1989) argues that study time should be focused on input in the form of reading and listening that is comprehensible. Krashen further states that language should be learned incidentally and subconsciously through natural acquisition. This stems from Krashen's Monitor Model theory that argues there are two systems, an acquisition system and a learning system. According to Krashen, the acquisition system is the more important of the two for L2 acquisition. The learning system plays the role of editor or correcting mechanism and is only useful after language has been acquired (Krashen, 1989). Krashen argues that direct teaching of vocabulary and grammar should be avoided as the time is better spent receiving comprehensible input (Krashen, 1989; 1993). These arguments follow the idea that with enough exposure at the right level, vocabulary and grammar will be acquired naturally.

While Krashen argues to avoid explicit vocabulary instruction in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) classroom, spacing and retrieval practice have been shown to provide support for learning target L2 vocabulary (Bird, 2011; Nakata, 2015; Nation, 2008; Sobel, Cepeda & Kepler, 2011). Schmitt (2010) argues the need for deeper connection or learning is of particular benefit in vocabulary retention as lexical knowledge is more apt to be forgotten through attrition than other linguistic aspects. The use of spaced repetition and retrieval are core aspects of mobile learning applications that focus on vocabulary acquisition. Teske (2017) argues an area that these applications may lack in efficacy, is that of teaching vocabulary in context. In L2 vocabulary learning, context is a core aspect of learning and may be the most important vocabulary learning strategy (Nation, 2008; Nation & Webb, 2011). With the GoldList Notebook, vocabulary can and should be introduced in context first through a lesson that could include reading, listening, writing, and speaking activities. The vocabulary would come from the lesson and be chosen by the instructor or the learner. Since the vocabulary comes from a specific lesson or activity, a connection between the target terms and the context they came from should be established before implementing the GoldList Method's steps.

A major aspect of L2 vocabulary learning in the classroom and for research, is testing of knowledge. According to Nation and Webb (2011) and Schmitt (2010), vocabulary acquired in the short-term should not be considered learned. Post testing of at least three weeks should be used to evaluate whether the target material has been stored in long-term memory and to show with confidence whether target word acquisition is durable. For research purposes, it is also important to limit the exposure of the target vocabulary as to not influence the factors of retention (Nation & Webb, 2011; Schmitt, 2010). The GoldList Method allows for this amount of time, or more if needed, to ensure durability of vocabulary recall.

While the underlining activities such as spacing and retrieval practice have been shown to be effective in L2 vocabulary learning (Bjork & Kroll, 2015), the role of the GoldList Notebook Method in the L2 classroom has not been well researched. This method includes the same type of desirable difficulties as that of mobile applications, but also includes the tactile pen-to-paper aspect requiring the learning to write the target word increasing the amount of time and lexical attention. According to Schmitt (2010), this lexical attention and increased time interacting with the word help facilitate learning. Before implementing the GoldList Notebook Method as part of the L2 learning curriculum, empirical research needs to be done. Therefore, this action research study focuses on the GoldList Notebook Method's efficacy in L2 vocabulary learning. Since this method can follow initial contextual learning and practice of the target vocabulary, spacing and retrieval aspects, and tactile pen-to-paper use, I hypothesize the method will show efficacy in the SLA university classroom. The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Is the GoldList Notebook Method effective in moving L2 vocabulary from first exposure to long-term retention?
2. Is there a difference in efficacy among differing spaced time retrieval review periods of more than a week?
3. What takeaways are there for L2 language teachers to implement the GoldList Notebook Method into the classroom?

Methodology

Context and Rationale for the Study

An issue among students in Japan is the focus on performance over long-term learning. This is evident in the numerous entrance exams students take for each level of education. English is a core component of entrance exams and within the English part of the tests, vocabulary recognition is paramount for a high score. Students in Japan often focus their effort towards performance on these high-stake tests, over long-term learning and use of the language. This leads to blocked studying, known as cramming, where forced repetition through flashcard applications or rote memorization are often methods of choice. After passing the exam and entering university, students are left without an effective method of learning L2 vocabulary for the purpose of long-term recall and transfer. The GoldList Notebook Method is a method with some similarities to flash cards but with a few key differences. It requires the learner to first create a headlist of target vocabulary from the context of a lesson plan or other activity such as reading an article. It then has the learner space their exposure to the target vocabulary so there is time to forget before trying to retrieve the meaning or terms from memory. The process of forgetting and the subsequent struggle to recall have shown efficacy in longer-term retention (Soderstrom & Bjork, 2015). This takes place by increasing and strengthening neural pathway connections (Bjork, 1994; Bjork & Bjork, 2011), which is done in this study through distillations in the GoldList Notebook. What is not well established is the optimal time period to wait before a retrieval session. This study investigates different periods of time between distillations to see if there is a significant difference in long-term recall. The study also looks into the effectiveness of the GoldList Notebook Method as a whole post initial vocabulary lesson compared to the lesson alone. As this is an in-class action research study, observations beyond testing data are noted by the study's facilitator that may be of importance to future studies or teachers looking to implement the GoldList Method.

Participants

In order to successfully answer the aforementioned questions, this study looked at data from 74 first-year ELLs attending a university in Tokyo, Japan. The participants were all Japanese L1 speakers, and the average age was 18. The participants were B1 to B2 CEFR English level as assessed by the Computerized Assessment System for English Communication (CASEC), which was conducted at the beginning of the school year by the university as an English level placement test. While the students were generally homogeneous in terms of background, their experience with English varied as some had lived abroad in high school. None of the students were English majors, so their primary English exposure came from the class this project studied. There were four classes with each constituting a group and forthwith will be referred to as Group. At the start of the study, the group sizes ranged from 17 to 24. Data from six participants was dropped from the study due to missing a quiz or the initial lesson. Therefore, data included in the results came from 74 participants with 21 males and 53 females. The four groups from which data was collected ranged from 16 to 22 participants per group (Group A = 16; Group B = 22; Group C = 19; Group D = 17). The groups were part of compulsory English courses that met for 100 minutes twice a week for fourteen weeks in the autumn semester from September 2021 to January 2022. The classes started online, being taught synchronously live via Zoom for the first five weeks before moving to face-to-face campus classes for the remaining nine weeks. English was the only language used by the instructor during the class sessions. Participants completed a consent form and were not provided compensation. Additionally, while the content in the study was part of the class, it was not considered in the

final grading and participants were informed at the beginning and throughout the study the pre- and post-tests would not be considered as part of their grade. The university where the study was conducted provided authorization, and participants were given the opportunity to have their data excluded at any time until the conclusion of the study. Risks such as possible data loss, were shared in the informed consent form and discussed prior to the start of the study.

The GoldList Notebook Method

The GoldList Notebook Method starts with a standard A4 sized paper notebook. This notebook replaces flashcards or mobile flashcard applications where target vocabulary is reviewed at pre-set intervals. The process of retrieving terms in the notebook is where the method plays a role in learning of vocabulary. It is not a lesson to introduce new vocabulary, but a tool for review and to strengthen recall. If the review sessions and spacing between the sessions are adhered to, the method provides the learner additional exposure to the target terms after the initial learning activity where the vocabulary was first introduced. This post-initial exposure is argued by Schmitt and Schmitt (2020) to be critical for consolidation. Furthermore, the method provides the desirable difficulties of spacing and retrieval practice which have been shown to increase retention of L2 vocabulary (Bjork & Kroll, 2015; Brown, Roediger, & McDaniel, 2014).

The process starts by laying the notebook flat with both the left and right page open. On each page a line is drawn down the middle vertically and a number is written on the left-hand column for each target vocabulary. A maximum of 20 words per session is recommended, but for more difficult terms or phrases fewer words may be more optimal. Ideally, the vocabulary used should come from an activity such as a reading task, lecture notes, or other lesson material where the terms are used in context and not chosen at random. The target word in L2 is written next to the number left of the line and the definition in L1, L2, or both is written on the right side of the line to the corresponding term. This initial list of vocabulary is known as the “headlist”. Above the headlist, the date it was created and any contextual reference, including a title of where the terms originated from, is written. Once this is completed, the notebook is closed, and the terms are not looked at again until the first retrieval review, which is known as a distillation. At its core, a distillation is a self-quizzing activity to find out whether the learner recalls the meaning of the term. The amount of time between distillations is up to the learner, but 2 weeks is commonly used. During the first distillation, the learner covers the definitions and tries to recall the meaning of the target L2 term. If the term is unable to be recalled, a small checkmark is placed next to the word. The learner will then switch to the definition side of the headlist, cover the target vocabulary, and try to recall the word from the definitions. Here again, if it is not recalled, a check is placed next to the definition. At this point, any terms / definitions not recalled are written on the next page using the same format as the headlist but mixing up the order of the vocabulary. The order is mixed up to ensure the learner does not recall the word due to remembering the order. There are three of these distillations which follow a clockwise order with distillation 2 being written below distillation 1, and distillation 3 being written under the original headlist. Figure 1 below illustrates the process. Any words still not learned in distillation 3, can be put into a new headlist, moved to a separate notebook, or simply discarded if deemed unneeded by the learner.

Figure 1
GoldList Notebook Stages (Originated from Language Mentoring, n.d.)



Figure 2
GoldList Notebook Set from Headlist through Distillation 3. (Originated from Language Mentoring, n.d.)



Data Collection and Analysis

This study used quantitative data (Mayring, 2002) pertaining to recall of L2 vocabulary, but some observational qualitative data (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018) was used when assessing functionality and practical issues around the GoldList Notebooks use in the classroom setting.

The pre- and post-tests used to collect scores were conducted via Moodle learner management system quiz function. Condition and treatment were coded according to the initial fixed effects model. Baseline treatment was used as the baseline for comparison to scores from the other treatments. The lesson plan and tests were identical among all treatments with the only difference being the period between distillations. Dependent variables were determined by correct answers to both pre- and post-tests compiled as a mean score for each treatment. The GoldList Notebook activities were not conducted in the Baseline treatment in order to show efficacy of the other treatments versus the initial lesson without GoldList Notebook usage. The study used R version 4.0.3 and R Studio 1.2.5 to run the models. Additionally, packages included lme4 (Bates, Mächler, Bolker, & Walker, 2015) and pairwise (Heine, 2021).

Lesson Materials

The materials used for this study originated from ESL Library's idiom lesson series titled "Detective Series 2: A Recipe for Disaster" (ESL Library, 2021). The first four lessons in the series were used and provided to the participants via pdf during class. Each lesson had between 9-11 idioms which were used as the target L2 vocabulary. The lessons also contained definition matching exercises, dialogue reading with target L2 idioms in context, synonym matching, and sentence generation activities. Idioms were used in place of single word vocabulary to better ensure participants did not have prior knowledge of the target L2 vocabulary. This way the baseline scores were more standardized and lower to better illustrate if the data were to show efficacy in the different treatments. During the setting up of the study, the tests were to be standard in the number of idioms tested of 10, but due to an error in coding the test in Moodle quiz function, the pre- and post-tests had a mean possible score of 9.75.

Procedure of the Study

The study consisted of four unique treatments: Frontloaded, Baseline, Mixed, and Standard as explained in the treatment descriptions and in Table 1. All groups were administered a pre-test for the target L2 idioms before being introduced in the lesson. The target idiom pre-test was in the form of a quiz with matching idioms to definitions in an answer bank. Time was limited to five minutes and participants were not allowed to use any type of reference material such as dictionaries or internet search engines during the tests. Following the pre-test, participants were provided the lesson and list of target idioms and given an hour to complete the lesson and review in groups of three to five participants. Each group had nine weeks between the initial pre-test, headlist, and lesson before taking the post-test, which was the same as the original pre-test. With the exception for the baseline treatment, each group had two weeks between the third distillation and the post-test, so there were no differences in length of time between final exposure to the target L2 idioms and the post-test except for the baseline treatment. Each group was exposed to the following treatments.

Treatments:

- Frontloaded treatment started with the headlist of idioms and focused on seeing if there was a benefit of retrieval session during the distillation task in weeks two, three, or seven during the use of the GoldList Notebook. Here the treatment focused on more exposure to the idioms early.
- Baseline treatment did not use the GoldList Notebook Method and simply had participants take the pre-test, complete the L2 target idiom lesson, and take the post-

test nine weeks later. The participants did not get any extra exposure to the target L2 idioms following the initial lesson.

- Mixed treatment had the participants do the first distillation in week two before waiting until week four for the second and week six for the third distillation.
- Standard treatment spaced all distillations exactly two weeks apart throughout the study taking place in weeks three, five, and seven. This differed from the other treatments that varied the time between distillations. Intervals of two weeks are the common length of time among polyglots utilizing the GoldList Notebook Method (Language Mentoring, n.d.).

Findings

Table 1 below is an example of the treatments and schedule. This example is of Group A. Other groups followed the same schedule, but the treatments alternated between groups so that each group was exposed to all the treatments once. This example is presented here to illustrate the distribution of treatments. Groups B, C, and D are similar, but the treatment to the sets varied.

Table 1

Example Schedule of Treatments from Group A

| Task Date | Set 1 (Frontloaded) | Set 2 (Baseline) | Set 3 (Mixed) | Set 4 (Standard) |
|-----------|---------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 9/27 | Headlist | | | |
| 10/4 | Distillation 1 | Baseline | | |
| 10/11 | Distillation 2 | | Headlist | |
| 10/18 | | | Distillation 1 | Headlist |
| 10/25 | | | | |
| 11/1 | | | Distillation 2 | Distillation 1 |
| 11/8 | Distillation 3 | | | |
| 11/15 | | | | Distillation 2 |
| 11/22 | | | Distillation 3 | |
| 11/29 | Post Test | | | Distillation 3 |
| 12/6 | | Post Test | | |
| 12/13 | | | Post Test | |
| 12/20 | | | | Post Test |

Results of Pre- and Post-tests by Treatment

The results below in Table 2 show the pre- and post-test scores. Correct answers are shown as mean scores with standard deviation by treatment. Baseline treatment is used as the baseline compared with other treatment results for all participants.

Table 2

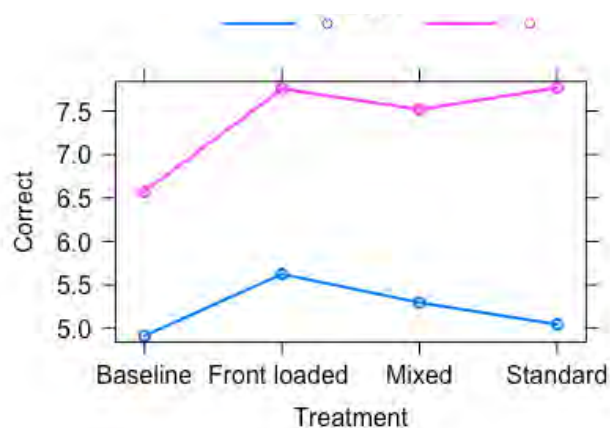
Descriptive Aggregate Results of Pre and Post Tests for Each Treatment in Mean (Standard Deviation)

| Treatment | Pre-test | Post-test | t |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Baseline | 4.921 (1.958) | 6.579 (2.424) | |
| Front loaded | 5.632 (2.006) | 7.763 (2.052) | 2.316 (1.092) |
| Mixed | 5.303 (2.239) | 7.526 (2.138) | 1.244 (1.304) |
| Standard | 5.053 (2.091) | 7.776 (2.004) | 0.429 (2.457) |

Figure 3 provides a visual representation by test type and treatment. The mean for number of idioms tested among all four treatments is 9.75, but the figure shows only the actual mean scores from the tests.

Figure 3

Test Type and Treatment Effect Plot: Blue Line – Pre-Test Mean Scores: Pink Line - Post-Test Mean Scores.



An initial model included fixed effects of mean scores and treatment so that the pre-test was the baseline score, and the “Baseline” treatment was the baseline condition. The dependent variable was based on whether idioms were matched correctly with the definition in the pre- and post-tests. Therefore, a generalized linear model was used for fixed effects. As would be expected, the lack of review sessions in the Baseline treatment is reflected in it being the least effective. Comparing other treatments to the Baseline, the model showed significant interaction of the Standard treatment ($t = 2.457$, $p = .0143$).

Figure 3 above suggests an improvement to the model from all treatments when compared to the baseline, but only the Standard treatment showed significant improvement. The standard treatment included two weeks between each distillation, while the other treatments varied between one and three weeks throughout the study. The lmer package with diffmeans function were used to conduct a pairwise comparison of treatments (exclusive of the fixed

comparison with the Baseline previously described), which confirmed the Standard treatment increased benefit over other treatments. In a nutshell, two weeks between review sessions throughout the study showed the greatest benefit with nearly twice the improvement of not using the GoldList Notebook Method. The other treatments also showed efficacy, but not to the same extent as the Standard two-week spacing between distillations. This provides evidence that spacing time between study sessions leads to better long-term recall of L2 vocabulary. In the following, more specifics will be provided directly relating to each of the three core questions asked at the beginning of the study.

Question 1: Is the GoldList Notebook Method effective in moving L2 vocabulary from first exposure to long-term retention?

This study looked at the use of the GoldList Method in learning L2 vocabulary specifically in the Japanese university classroom. The quantitative results showed increased learning of L2 idioms compared to not using the method. Therefore, the method shows efficacy over the lesson plan alone, referred to as the Baseline treatment in this study. This is described visually in Figure 3 where all the treatments show larger differences between pre-, and post-tests compared to the baseline. Specifically, the difference from baseline was most pronounced in the Standard treatment. The efficacy with that of the other treatments, was not as pronounced, but still showed improvement which is further discussed in Question 2.

Question 2: Is there a difference in efficacy among differing spaced time retrieval review periods of more than a week?

There was a difference in results between the three non-baseline treatments. The Standard treatment with two-week intervals between retrieval activities showed the most benefit. This was somewhat surprising as Ebbinghaus originally showed that spacing between study sessions when gradually expanded, is most effective (Didau, 2015). The benefit shown over the other treatments may be due to the consistency between study periods. Another possible reason is the extra week from initial idiom exposure in the lesson to the first distillation. Both the frontloaded and mixed treatments had only one week before the first distillation. This may indicate a need for more spacing of time after initial exposure to the target vocabulary. The two-week treatment may be optimal for class use as distillations can be scheduled regularly. Benefit of treatments is shown here from most beneficial to least: 1) Standard 2) Mixed 3) Front loaded 4) Baseline.

Question 3: What takeaways are there for L2 language teachers to implement the GoldList Notebook Method into the classroom?

Teachers of L2 who implement this method in their classroom should be aware students may forget their notebook at times. While not an option for most university classrooms, junior and high school settings where the same classroom is used daily, may allow for the notebooks to be kept in the classroom. This would alleviate the issue of students forgetting their notebook. This then allows for regular use from the headlist through the three distillations as long as students attend class on the days of the notebook is used. Notebooks could be given to students when complete if deemed necessary for future autonomous student use. It is also important for teachers to check notebooks regularly to ensure the activities are being done properly and regularly. In this study, the distillations were used as a class warm-up activity. This task allowed students the chance to retrieve L2 vocabulary and help clear external ruminations from smartphone use carried over from before the start of class. Educators have noted that

smartphone use is most distracting at the beginning of class, so an activity where smartphones are clearly not allowed helped in turning the students' attention towards the classroom content. Finally, early in the implementation of the study, many participants found the steps in the study unclear, so providing the students with a mentored example could be useful. In this study the facilitator worked on his own GoldList Notebook learning L2 Italian in front of the groups and provided example pictures in Italian on a projector screen of each step in the process.

Discussion

The present study revealed how effective the GoldList Notebook Method is when implemented in an L2 university classroom and whether some adjustments to the spaced time periods between distillations would show further benefit. The role of spacing and retrieval in the GoldList Notebook showed there is efficacy across all treatments and further benefit to longer spacing periods early in the review process as the initial two-week time was twice that of the other treatments. These findings confirm other findings in the literature on spacing (Bird, 2011; Nakata, 2015; Rohrer, 2009; Sobel, Cepeda, & Kapler, 2011) and retrieval practice (Bjork, 1975; Bjork & Kroll, 2015; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020; Soderstrom & Bjork, 2015) as they relate to L2 vocabulary learning. During the lesson when the vocabulary items were introduced, participants received the most exposure through multiple tasks. These tasks included reading, matching, and generation activities through speaking, all of which were in context. The lesson was by far the most extensive exposure to the vocabulary the participants received, so their recall would likely be stronger soon after the lesson. This may have played a role in the increased initial struggle of the Standard two-week spaced gap versus the one-week of the other treatments. As described by Soderstrom & Bjork (2015) and Bjork (1994), this extra difficulty likely caused more difficulty in recalling terms and therefore making stronger connections, which developed into better recall later in the Week Nine post-test. Additionally, the consistency of how much time between distillations of the Standard treatment may have played a role in the increased efficacy. This made it easier for participants to schedule their distillations and less likely to mistake it with another distillation from a different lesson.

Finally, the qualitative observations made throughout the study provide insights into possible pitfalls to implementing the method in the classroom. Teachers should be aware that students in university courses, and therefore likely in pre-university classes as well, have issues with forgetting to bring the notebook to class. Additionally, they frequently omitted the date at the top of each distillation. One possible solution to this issue is keeping the notebooks in the classroom where the teacher has more control to ensure the notebooks are available. However, this may not be feasible for all settings such as the university setting this study was set in. By not allowing the students access to the notebooks between distillations, extra exposure to the terms is further limited thus leading to more struggle to recall during distillations and therefore more durable neural connections. An option when keeping the notebooks in class is not possible, is assigning students to take a picture and upload it to a learner management system on the day the distillation is due. This will not limit the possibility of extra exposure by eager students, but it can help in confirming students are completing the distillations as scheduled. Finally, use of size A4 notebook is recommended for a couple of reasons. First, smaller notebooks do not allow enough space for distillation 3 if the original headlist is 20 words. There needs to be enough space under the headlist in case there are more than a couple terms still not known at this stage. Likewise, skipping lines between headlist terms also limits space for the third distillation. The A4 size enables students to include more than just translated definitions. If there is enough room, example sentences, drawings, or L2 synonyms can also be included in the headlist further adding possibilities for contextual recall.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study investigated a vocabulary learning method with little published research in general and particularly in the classroom. The study began virtually, making oversight of adherence by participants more difficult. The study was also limited in scope to the specific three questions in the discussion section. While the implementation of a L2 vocabulary learning application may be just as or more effective as the GoldList Notebook findings, this study did not directly compare the two. The number of idioms used in the study may have been too lengthy or not long enough for some participants. Due to the Covid 19 situation at the end of the semester, the study was not able to implement a participant questionnaire for feedback which may have provided more insight into the student perspectives and specifics such as number of items used in each set.

Another limitation arose from participants forgetting to bring the GoldList Notebook to class. As the class started online, this issue was not initially apparent. It is not clear if the participants were actually writing in the notebook or on a separate sheet of paper and later putting the information into the notebook, which could affect the data results. This action would provide the participants an extra exposure and eliminate the specified spaced time between distillations for each treatment. In an attempt to solve this issue, participants were required to present the GoldList Notebook in class for the instructor to check. If numerous distillations were missed or a notebook was lost, the participant data was omitted from the study, hence 6 participants were dropped from the results.

Another issue that arose was the lack of writing dates in the notebook for the headlists and distillations. Since distillations were conducted live in class and facilitated by the instructor, this did not affect the data. For more autonomous use of the GoldList Notebook Method, the lack of dates could become an issue. Additionally, while participants were instructed to not write the missed target L2 idioms when performing distillations in the same order as a previous distillation or headlist, many participants did not comply.

Conclusion

This study tested the GoldList Notebook Method and the impact of spacing and retrieval integrated into the activities on the long-term recall of L2 vocabulary among university students in Japan. The findings contribute to teachers looking for a low-stakes and inexpensive way to regularly expose students to target vocabulary without having to use daily quizzes which may cause anxiety among the learners. It is significant to state that the GoldList Notebook Method is promising for teens and adults but may be inappropriate for use with very young ELLs or ELLs who are newcomers arriving from harsh places.

The research conducted in this study shows that there is benefit through making small additions or adjustments to the curriculum. Much can be achieved in as little as a few minutes at the beginning of class as was the case here. Spacing and retrieval are strategies that can be implemented into many different parts of the L2 curriculum. Having a simple method teachers and students can use with confidence, is very practical. The teacher-researcher knows best what can be easily implemented into the curriculum and whether the GoldList Notebook Method might work in his/her class. In future research, investigation into the difference between mobile applications and the GoldList Notebook Method is warranted. If similar benefit can be achieved with mobile applications, facilitation of L2 vocabulary review among students may be more

easily conducted by the teacher. The GoldList Notebook Method is just one tool for teachers to consider, implement, experiment with, and adjust to their learners` needs.

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Facebook as a Flexible Ubiquitous Learning Space for Developing Speaking Skills

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Abstract

The research studied the effectiveness of the integration of Facebook as a flexible ubiquitous learning space into the educational process for speaking skills development of undergraduate students learning English as a second language. For this purpose teaching was organised via a specially created and moderated Facebook group where various media resources, uploaded materials, links to different applications and other social networking opportunities were accumulated. It was designed to achieve the educational programme objectives and address the specifics of digital age learning. A set of specially designed materials posted on the Facebook platform for language input, structured output, and communicative output activities was applied in experimental teaching to develop talk as transition, talk as interaction and mediation, and talk as performance. The results of the quasi-experiment (students' speaking performance) were assessed in the form of the post-test with the data being analysed and interpreted based on descriptive and inferential statistics (independent samples t-test) by means of SPSS. The results revealed higher achievement scores of the experimental group in comparison to the control group in terms of expanding vocabulary, increasing English grammar literacy, developing interactive skills, discourse management, and pronunciation. The survey administered to find out the learners' impressions of the successfulness of the FB-assisted activities revealed their overall positive attitude to the new methodology and usefulness for the development of all speaking qualifications checked.

Keywords: Facebook, interactive communication, speaking skills development, ubiquitous learning

The COVID-19 pandemic that societies and members of the educational community have experienced blurred the lines between formal and informal education making educationalists find productive ways of combining virtual and physical learning environments (Ng, 2021), providing educational content that should be easily accessible for learners (Bygstad, Øvrelid, Ludvigsen, & Dæhlen, 2022), boosting students' motivation and engagement and improving their performance in the altered reality (Oberländer & Bipp, 2021; Wang, Cao, Gong, Wang, Li, & Ai, 2022). Modern digital learners surrounded by digital communication technology that they use for social and entertainment purposes have developed new learning styles. They actively use various devices to study and prefer engaging, interactive, on-demand learning materials accessible anytime and anywhere (Gallardo-Echenique, 2015). The fact that learning in the new digital age is conditioned socially and digitally by various technologies has stimulated the researchers to consider students' customary ways of life and information perception. Special attention has been paid to popular social media providing numerous ways to communicate, convey, share, and generate content. Their potentials to support collaborative learning (Zheng, Niiya, & Warschauer 2015), provide learner-centred environments (Liburd and Christensen, 2013), facilitate student engagement, boost students' attention to content, access outside resources, expose students to practice (Gruzd, Haythornthwaite, Paulin, Gilbert, & Del Valle, 2018) have also been studied. In addition, social media's ability to make users connected and how the ubiquitous nature of this type of media makes them valuable tools for education have been considered. In this context, the use of social networks in e-learning or blended learning considering all the difficulties that arise nowadays in the learning environment can help adapt to the changed conditions and devise innovative methodology.

The educational potential of social networking sites, namely Facebook, for foreign language acquisition, has been analysed in numerous research studies (Lampe, Wohn, Vitak, Ellison & Wash, 2011; Kabilan & Zahar, 2016; Hamidah, 2017; Slisko, 2021). In this study, the researchers investigated the effectiveness of the incorporation of the Facebook environment into the educational process for speaking skills development. The researchers utilised Facebook as a flexible ubiquitous learning space. First, Facebook was seen as a learning environment employed for teaching and learning. Second, in alignment with the traditional understanding of ubiquitous learning, learning via the Facebook group was organised with the support of mobile or embedded computers and wireless networks (Ogata, Matsuka, El-Bishouty & Yano, 2009) to provide content and interaction anytime and anywhere (Hwang, Tsai, & Yang, 2008). The following principles of ever-present learning such as permanent access to the target material, the ability to find information immediately, interaction in the educational network and practice in real-life situations have been exploited. Third, flexibility – the ability to adapt the learning content to the programme objectives and students' needs – was achieved by employing various applications and multimedia materials and uploading specially generated or carefully selected materials. All the mentioned materials and activities facilitated organising task-oriented and contextual activities and encouraged user-created content and peer feedback. Thus, the research was designed to answer two research questions:

RQ1: Can the use of FB as a flexible ubiquitous learning space be an effective technique for developing speaking skills of undergraduate students studying English as a second language?

RQ2: What are the learners' impressions of the successfulness of the use of FB activities for developing their speaking skills?

Literature Review

Connectivism Principles in the Digital Age

Connectivism, which in modern research is frequently associated with the use of social networks for educational purposes, is a relatively new phenomenon that appeared as a response to the intense use of technology in education. Although its position in science is disputable, as Siemens (2005) introduced it as a new learning theory, while other scholars define it as the third generation of pedagogy of distance education (Anderson & Dron, 2012), it addresses the specifics of the new digital age learning that experienced the tectonic shift from internal, individualised activity to the interaction of the individual on networks (Siemens, 2005).

According to connectivists, knowledge nowadays is distributed through a network of connections and requires the ability to construct and traverse those networks (Downes, 2012). Modern learning is not a process that is completely under the control of the individual. It is not just knowledge transferring, it requires active communication of learners through networks with the learning sources (Kop, 2011). Al Dahdouh, Osório and Caires (2015) consider that learning today is what learners can reach in the external network: other people, organisations, databases, and other artefacts. Learning is now not a self-directed process, it is a network-directed one, and social media play a significant role in this process helping learners interact and learn actively.

Connectivism outlines the four key principles for learning: autonomy, connectedness, diversity, and openness (Downes, 2010). Ally (2008) stressed the importance of the application of these ideas in the process of designing learning materials and instructions. The researcher highlighted the significance of autonomous and independent learning for students. They should be allowed to access and research information preferably in a networked learning environment. The learners should update knowledge by active networked participation which means that they should be able to connect with each other and express and share information. Diversity of sources for information obtaining and diversity of technology interfaces for information delivery should be provided. Authentic and experiential learning should be organised by continuous information finding and research.

E-learning and Speaking Skills Development

The effectiveness of e-learning and digital-language teaching is noted by various researchers, especially in the era of the pandemic. Zakarneh (2018) considers an electronic platform more acceptable than a traditional classroom not only for acquiring knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing skills but also for developing speaking skills.

Some research investigates specifics of speaking skills development in the e-learning process (Rodrigues & Vethamani, 2015). Lamy & Hampel (2007) consider that online learning has expanded in oral discourse. This communication can be established via the Internet between learners and native speakers (Tudini, 2003) and between learners themselves (Yilmaz & Granena, 2010). Online communication gives the possibility to talk with expert speakers and allows shy students to express themselves more freely as there is less teacher control and more authentic tasks (Rodrigues & Vethamani, 2015; Holubnycha, 2019). Egbert (2005) explains that online communication provides learners with opportunities to communicate orally with other people in an environment that is conducive to learning. Abrams (2003) puts forward the idea that online communication enables language learners to have oral communication with

real audiences and provides them with authentic language experiences. Robin (2016) emphasises the importance of digital storytelling as a special activity that may improve oral proficiency. It involves telling stories using blended digital media elements which may include text, pictures, audio narration, music and video. Ajayi (2008) also puts forward the idea that the use of e-learning facilities, which involves various tools and techniques from feedback systems to video and audio conferencing, may increase opportunities for lifelong learning.

Challenges in the Development of Speaking Skills

An analysis of the studies on the issue of difficulties in teaching speaking displays several factors which make a significant impact on learners' speaking skills. Scholars commonly divide the factors that contribute to speaking problems into two classes – linguistic and non-linguistic (Horwitz, 2001; Susilawati, 2017). Linguistic difficulties are connected with the lack of vocabulary (Adam, 2016) as a significant component of foreign language proficiency (Cook, 2013), grammar rules, poor knowledge, and incorrect pronunciation. Non-linguistic or psychological problems are usually caused by a lack of learner's confidence leading to fear of making a mistake which results in learners' low perception abilities and difficulties in processing language output (Susilawati, 2017). Hosni (2014) and Rahayu (2015) singled out the factors which influence the problems in speaking activity, namely: 1) inhibition 2) nothing to say 3) low participation 4) mother tongue use 5) low motivation 6) environment factors 7) lack of confidence.

The term “inhibition”, regarding foreign language speaking performance, has recently become an object of scholars' concern and extensive research (Abedini & Chalak, 2017; Loan & Tuyen, 2020). Inhibition is viewed as an obstacle for effective communication making learners hesitant, anxious and passive during their speaking performance (Rumiyati & Seftika, 2018). In addition, Megawati and Mandaran (2016) stress that low or uneven participation can be a problem in a large speaking class when not every student can have enough time for speaking and other students fear being heard by other communication participants, some of which may tend to dominate.

Methodology

For the profound investigation of the research problem, the theoretical methods of conceptual and comparative analysis and synthesis were used while studying the systematic review of social media integration for teaching speaking (John & Yunus, 2021). The works analyzed in this and other research and the applied methods of quasi-experiment (Marleni & Asilestari, 2018; Saputra, 2018), pre-post testing (Minalla, 2018; AlSaleem, 2018), observation (Hamad, 2017) and survey (Fowler, 2013; Nadeem, 2020; Quadi, 2021; Malik, 2021) made the authors devise their own research design and use the empirical methods such as testing, observation, quasi-experiment and survey to investigate the impact of Facebook learning opportunities for speaking skills development in the experimental group. The statistical methods, descriptive and inferential statistics as well as independent samples t-test, were utilised for the evaluation of the quasi-experiment results.

Participants

The research was carried out during the first semester of the 2020-2021 academic year at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University. The participants (N=116) were the first-year undergraduate students who attended the compulsory academic course “Foreign Language”

(Introduction to Legal English). The permission to conduct the study was obtained from the University. All the students were informed about the nature of the research and participated voluntarily.

Instruments and Research Procedure

The research was carried out in three main stages: *pre-experimental stage*, *experimental teaching and experimental assessment*. During the *pre-experimental stage*, the researchers made the sampling of participants. All the first-year students taking the course completed a uniform English language proficiency test (pre-test) consisting of two parts: 1) assessing language knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, reading, listening and writing and 2) speaking skills. The approximate equality of all the developed general English skills applied at groups selection was vitally essential for the accuracy of the quasi-experiment prospective results assessment. Based on the test results, 6 academic groups with approximately equal proficiency level were selected out of total 12. The selected 6 groups were randomly divided into the control group (3 academic groups; N=58) and experimental group (3 academic groups; N=58).

At the stage of *experimental teaching*, students of the experimental and control groups learnt the same academic material and were to develop the same speaking competencies determined in the syllabus of the academic course. The traditional education techniques were used to teach the control group, while the students of the experimental group were exposed to the learning materials posted on the Facebook platform. The aim was to develop their skills in talk as transition, talk as interaction and mediation, and talk as performance. For this reason there were no risks for students to participate in the experimental teaching. The materials were uploaded on FB in advance and were previously selected and adapted. The quasi-experiment was focused on four aspects of developing speaking skills: vocabulary and grammar, discourse management, interactive communication, and pronunciation. That is why teaching via the Facebook group was carried out during one semester, a four-month period, and sometimes several activities were applied depending on the teaching goals. Some FB-related assignments were given as home tasks. Thus, experimenters applied some principles of the flipped classroom model. Understanding and remembering as the lowest level of Bloom's taxonomy at times took place before a lesson. For example, the introduction of new vocabulary as well as exposure to the target material to boost students' interest or make them find additional information would be taught at the lower levels of the taxonomy. It resulted in the more efficient upper level application and analysis during the lesson. Continuous assessment of students' speaking performance progress in various forms depending on the competencies and objectives took place throughout the semester.

The experimental assessment consisted of several steps. 1) At the end of the semester after the experimental treatment, the researchers assessed speaking performance of the experimental group and control group students in the form of the post-test which included two sections: monologic and dialogic. The first section was taken individually and required a one-minute talk on one of the programme topics, such as main modern legal systems and their basic characteristics or responsibilities of legal professionals in the United States and the UK. The second was performed in groups of three where students were to discuss some programme-related controversial issues such as the use of capital punishment or false forced confession. Cambridge English (B2) assessment scales divided into six bands from 0 to 5 for each criterion (vocabulary and grammar, discourse management, interactive communication, and pronunciation) and descriptors were applied by the researchers. The data was collected,

analysed and interpreted based on descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics such as independent samples t-test by means of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) The comparison between the post test results obtained in control and experimental groups was made to answer the first research question (RQ1) and verify the authors' hypothesis that a Facebook group can be productively used as a ubiquitous learning space for speaking skills development. 2) All students of the experimental group completed a survey that was designed to answer the second research question (RQ2). An initial questionnaire was created after reviewing relevant literature and based on the principles of reliability (Fowler, 2013). Respondents were asked to answer 5 questions concerning their general perception and feelings about the use of FB for developing speaking (Q1), increasing knowledge of legal vocabulary and grammar (Q2), more effective discourse management (Q3), progressing interactive abilities (Q4), and improving pronunciation (Q5). All items included in the questionnaire were compiled following the objectives of the research and adopted in similar previous studies (Rajagopal & Shah, 2021; Qadi, 2021; Kojo, Agyekum & Arthur, 2018). However, in this study, questioning items explored the five categories of speaking abilities and certain questions were constructed to cover new opportunities of Facebook that had not been included in previous research.

In designing and creating the questionnaire, the researchers used a model based on a 5-point Likert type scale. A pilot testing was conducted on 10 participants to check the questionnaire's clarity. To obtain validity, the questionnaire was presented to a group of university professors from the Department of Foreign Languages of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University to get their comments and suggestions. When the original questionnaire was amended and the modifications made, the final questionnaire was presented. The responses were obtained and analysed, and the number of answers given to each statement was converted to percentages and presented in the pie charts.

Research Material

To conduct the research the authors designed a set of learning materials aimed at speaking skills development which included the development of *talk as transition*, *talk as interaction and mediation*, and *talk as performance*. The new tendencies in EL teaching summarised in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume (2020) were taken into account. Assignments for *talk as transition* practice concentrated on the ability to convey clear and accurate messages to others with the aim to inform, describe, confirm, make suggestions, justify an opinion and so forth. *Talk as interaction* was developed as a discourse co-constructed by two or more interlocutors aimed at fulfilling the interpersonal and evaluative functions. Among those functions were understanding an interlocutor, information exchange, maintaining a topic-related conversation, participation in formal/informal discussions, debates, interviews, and goal-oriented co-operations. The work with *talk as mediation* focused on the students' abilities to mediate legal concepts and texts. It involved the ability to construct new meanings, to adapt new or complex notions and pass on information in an appropriate and comprehensible form as well as the ability to mediate communication (to act as an intermediary in disagreements or facilitate oral interaction in delicate situations). The tasks for *talk as performance* centred on the oral report, presentation-making, and digital storytelling skills. The activities utilised for these objectives were divided into three main groups.

Language Input Activities

Due to the specific features of Legal English grammar and vocabulary, the researchers first concentrated on the development of linguistic competence by employing *form-oriented input activities* for both intentional and incidental vocabulary and grammar learning. Visual displays of the vocabulary and grammar rules (ready-made or specially created charts, wordlists, infographics as well as word clouds) were applied. In addition, quizzes, interactive tests, links to online vocabulary games and different multimedia format materials were posted on the Facebook group. A detailed description of this material and used applications was given by the authors in the previous article (Mykytiuk, Lysytska, & Melnikova, 2020).

Secondly, the attention was paid to the discourse competence which included: 1) the development of knowledge and skills connected with the use of cohesion devices, 2) coherence devices such as conjunctive adverbs and transitional expressions to show logical relationships, or to contrast, to compare, to exemplify, to expand and 3) genres specifics like oral report, lawyer-client interview. Sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence, for example, to encourage, to agree or disagree, to criticise) were also focused on. The researchers supposed that information visualisation (charts, infographics, diagrams, descriptive texts) would help to deliver relevant material effectively to facilitate understanding, to perceive patterns easier, to improve retention, and make the work faster and more productive.

Content-oriented input activities were utilised to introduce the new topic, to provide additional information, to present opposite viewpoints and to give thought-provoking. Speaking activities were organised with the posts on the FB group containing topic-related latest news, reference information, fragments of articles as well as listening and video chunks. For example, a *picture/infographic narrating activity*. Several sequential pictures or infographics were typically used for this activity. The teacher provided information on the ways of using the pictures /infographics to create a story, which could be posted as a comment to the post. This comment could include the necessary vocabulary or grammar structures to use while narrating. The screenshot of the infographic posted on the Facebook platform for the narrating activity is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

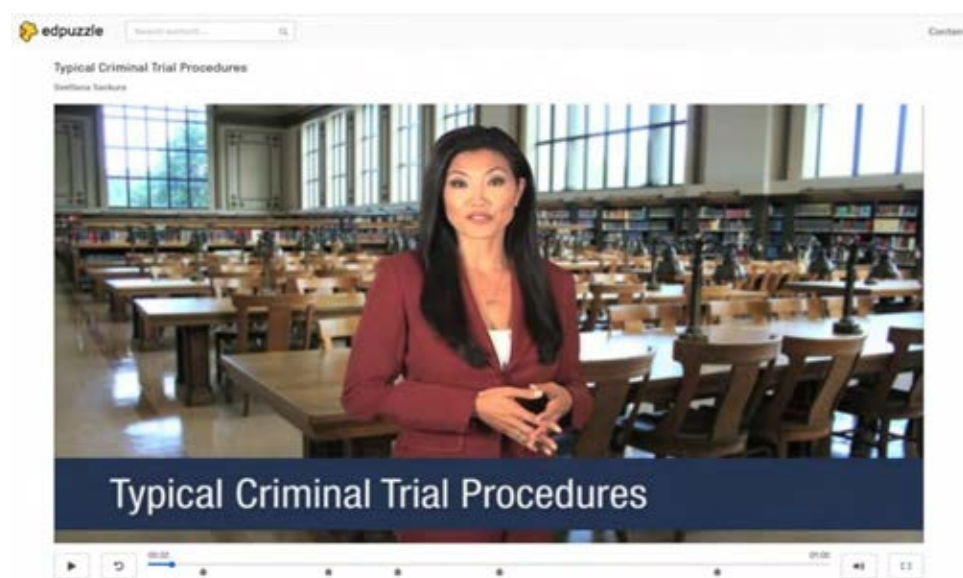
The Screenshot of the Infographic Posted on the Facebook Platform for the Infographic Narrating Activity



Special emphasis was put on the ready-made educational video materials taken from different sources (Learn Business English, Study Legal English, engVid, Cambridge Law Studio and so forth). Some parts of TV programmes, lectures taken from a number of websites, including YouTube, TED, Vimeo, Veritasium, as well as official promotional videos of international, EU and European organisations were used to create interactive materials. Sometimes open-ended or multiple-choice questions and comments on videos were embedded with the EdPuzzle tool. They were productively exploited to present topic-related information and to send the video assignments to students. It helped to provide asynchronous communication and assess their understanding of the material or progress and finally to organise oral practice. The screenshot of the interactive video with the embedded test prepared on the EdPuzzle platform is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

An Interactive Video with the Embedded Test Prepared on Edpuzzle Platform



To work with the topic related content and to practice pronunciation, word stress, intonation, rhythm, fluency and connected utterances the *speech shadowing activity* was organised with the posted authentic short video and listening materials. This technique included active listening to comprehend the speech and repeating what was heard in real-time. The researchers supposed that this technique would be beneficial for developing listening comprehension, the ability to produce speech, to learn new vocabulary, and practice metacognitive monitoring skills. It was employed both as an in-class and out-class assignment. Special attention was given to it when practising talk as performance.

Structured Output Activities. These were partly authentic and partly artificial activities aimed for the initial stage of spoken production development. The materials posted on the FB platform provided access to forms or structures that students had to use to practice particular language or terminology, to obtain missing information, to exchange necessary information and so on. Primarily talk as transition was practised.

The researchers applied the *information gap* technique taking into consideration that a need for meaningful communication gives the learners a genuine motivation to speak which usually results in learning the language more effectively. Information gap activity raised motivation

for speaking due to real communication and developed learners' sub-skills such as paraphrasing and clarifying meaning. While performing this activity the learners activated their previous knowledge of the topical vocabulary, and acquired new lexical units which they lacked while making questions. Hence, their speaking skills focused on communication achievements rather developed.

Students were also asked to use posted tables, Freya models, grids or comparison charts to fill in the gaps basing on what was said by their group mates or read information. In addition, they created their charts using different applications (Visme, amCharts, Canva) and posted them on the FB group for their group mates to complete. The screenshot of the comparison chart posted on the FB group is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

A Comparison Chart Posted on the FB Group for the Information Gap Activity

| | PROCEDURAL LAW | SUBSTANTIVE LAW |
|-------------|--|-----------------|
| Definition | DEALS WITH AND LAYS DOWN THE WAYS AND MEANS BY WHICH SUBSTANTIVE LAW CAN BE ENFORCED | |
| Powers | NO INDEPENDENT POWERS | |
| Application | CAN BE APPLIED IN NON LEGAL CONTEXTS | |
| Regulation | BY STATUTORY LAW | |

The *scriptorium technique* closely related to the shadowing activity was also applied as class and home assignments. In addition to repeating the information heard from the posted video and audio materials students were required to write it down. The researchers believed that the use of more than one sensory organ would help to remember better the pronunciation and the structure of sentences. Then students were asked to analyse, make a plan of the received information and create their own reports/utterances following the written examples.

The posted messages, narrated stories, news bulletins, interviews and parts of documentaries were used to organise such activities as *note taking* and *summarising* information orally. Students indicated agreement or disagreement, responded, and evaluated the information using provided structures or scales. In addition, they made a list of interview questions, and created a new one according to examples.

In *jigsaw activities* students could share their knowledge with groupmates. Firstly, students were divided into small groups that discussed and studied the posted material on a particular topic and then they were re-shuffled into new groups with representatives from each previous

group where they shared the information of their original discussion. New groups had to synthesise and present all the discussed ideas.

Communicative Output Activities

Talk as interaction, mediation and performance were practised using these activities which helped to progress from reactive to proactive participation. Different communicative language competences from linguistic to pragmatic and sociolinguistic were developed. Among them the ability to take the discourse initiative, to intervene politely, to facilitate and manage collaborative interaction were trained.

Brainstorming was one of these activities which is traditionally based on learners' contributing to the free flow of ideas and performed by each learner individually. The researchers posted a debatable topic Capital Punishment: Pros and Contras for brainstorming. It was important for the researchers to be sure that every learner realised the essence of the topic so it was accompanied with some prompts and explanations. The list of relevant lexical units was added. This type of activity facilitated learners' acquiring new vocabulary and information and activating passive vocabulary. It provided a link between new and existing knowledge, making intelligent guesses and motivated students to communicate by allowing them to express ideas freely without the risk of being criticised, which formed a productive basis for further discussion of the topic in class.

Expressing opinions / ideas activities were organised with the posted videos or texts on controversial topics. For example: Come out with your opinions on the following statement: "The incidence of crime is due to the general state of culture". Sometimes students were provided with a link to Pear Deck or Padlet where they could write their ideas and then comment on them. The more complicated tasks related to this activity were *perspective-taking*. Students were asked to support a standpoint even if it was different from their own. They used the brainstormed ideas or posted materials, expressed a personal response to the posted texts with controversial ideas as well as analysed and criticised argumentative texts. *Social media bubble analysis* was also employed to explain a writer's or speaker's ideas or viewpoints.

The Facebook group provided the area to discuss and exchange ideas on topics of general and special interest. A *discussion* was held to conclude or just to summarise the existing ideas. The researchers employed different in-class discussion activities from developmental discussion to panel discussion and Socratic seminars. The screenshot of the video unit "Prisoners during Covid: There is not much hope" posted on the FB group for discussion activity is shown in Figure 4. After viewing the video unit (as a home task assignment) students made the list of the problems the prisoners mentioned, were asked to find any other problems in various resources, in comments wrote possible solutions and discussed them in the class.

Figure 4

A Screenshot of the Video Unit Posted on the FB Group for Discussion Activity



Role-play / interview activities were also utilised in the process of ubiquitous FB-mediated learning. A teacher provided a theme to students and with the help of a Facebook link they were redirected to the quiz which presented the ideas and brief information with possible questions to the interviewee. The link to the video sample of an interview with a famous defence lawyer also helped the students to realise not only the content but the style, language, and life hacks they should use. Interview techniques allowed stimulating the students to be active and communicate freely taking the roles of an interviewer and interviewee.

Story completion as a free-speaking and creative activity was organised by researchers by posting on the Facebook group a text on committing a certain crime. The text contained several initial sentences aimed to picture the basic circumstances of an event. The individual pre-class task for the learners was to predict the possible sequence of further events. Learners were to post the essential vocabulary of their story development in a group for everybody's access. Such actions gave other students a possibility to be acquainted with potentially unknown lexical units. Completing this task helped the learners enhance their speaking skills through activating topical and new vocabulary. In addition, the students trained grammar patterns application, as well as demonstrated creativity.

Digital story narrating was a group assignment when students were to write scripts and present ideas orally in short video units. This activity not only improved students' language and communicative competences but also helped to develop their digital literacy as they used different film-making applications and posted their videos. It promoted autonomous learning and made education student-centred and collaborative. The best works participated in the annual digital story contest at the University. A screenshot about this event posted on the FB group is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5

A Screenshot of the Post about the Digital Story Contest Posted on the FB Group



Results

The Effectiveness of FB as a Flexible Ubiquitous Learning Space for Developing Speaking Skills

The employed independent-samples t-test revealed the following results shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Independent-Samples T-Test Results of the Achievement Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups on the Speaking Post Test

| <i>Speaking assessment criteria</i> | <i>EG Mean/SD (n=58)</i> | <i>CG Mean/SD (n=58)</i> | <i>t-value</i> | <i>p-value</i> |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Vocabulary and grammar | 4.241±0.709 | 3.793±0.744 | -3.324 | <0,001 |
| Discourse management | 4.086±0.732 | 3.638±0.693 | -3.385 | <0,001 |
| Interactive communication | 4.224±0.702 | 3.776±0.702 | -3.439 | <0,001 |
| Pronunciation | 4.19±0.736 | 3.845±0.745 | -2.508 | <0,014 |

As it is represented in Table I, there is a significant difference between the test achievement scores of control and experimental groups according to all four checked criteria. According to the “vocabulary and grammar knowledge” criterion $t = -3.324$, $p < 0,001$; mean score of the experimental group achievement (=4.241) is higher than the control group’s achievement (=3.793) score. The outperformance of the experimental group could be attributed to the frequent exposure to the target vocabulary and grammar rules and patterns in different contexts. It contributed to intentional and incidental learning. The visual nature of material presentation possibly was productive for information processing, retention, and retrieval. The uploaded materials helped to organise real-life context interactional practice in which students were able to generate the target material performing various assignments.

According to “discourse management” criterion $t = -3.385$, $p < 0.001$; mean score of experimental group achievement (= 4.086) is better than the control group’s achievement (=3.638) score. More effective discourse management of the experimental group supposedly was achieved by explicit visualised teaching of cohesion and coherence devices and exemplified teaching of different genres specifics, conversational principles, paralinguistic features, and linguistic means of conversational functions. Provision with a wide authentic context could help expand knowledge on the topic, produce topic-related extended utterances and practice accomplishment of various strategic and other functions important for talk as transition, interaction, mediation, and performance in organised guided and free speaking activities.

According to “interactive communication” criterion $t = -3.439$, $p < 0.001$; mean score of experimental group achievement (= 4.224) is higher than the control group’s achievement (=3.776) score. It may be suggested that exposure to authentic and educational video and audio conversations for both in-class and out-class activities might have resulted in better reception of interaction patterns and subsequent more productive practice of interpersonal and evaluative functions in talks as interaction and mediation by the experimental group.

According to “pronunciation” criterion $t = -2.508$, $p < 0.001$; mean score of the experimental group achievement (= 4.19) is better than the control group’s achievement (=3.845) score. Listening to authentic English in posted real world audios and videos provided students with natural sound pronunciation, word stress, intonation, and rhythm which they could imitate later in oral practice. Probably it led to better achievement.

The researchers suppose that the method and materials applied in the quasi-experiment facilitated the elimination of the usually emerging difficulties in teaching speaking. Speaking activities organised with the posts on the FB group aimed to smooth the learners’ possible speaking problems. Language input activities – form-oriented and content-oriented – concentrated on one of the main causes of speaking difficulties which is lack of grammar and vocabulary knowledge. Structured and communicative output activities were intended to develop the learners’ skills to produce utterances and progress from reactive to proactive discourse participation. As p-values according to all assessment criteria were less than the value of probability (0.05), it could be stated that the treatment used on the experimental group enhanced students’ achievement, which supports our hypothesis about the effectiveness of the suggested methodology.

Learners’ Impressions of the Successfulness of the Use of FB Activities for Developing Their Speaking Skills

The survey addressed to 58 students of the experimental group aimed at finding out the impression of students about the effectiveness of FB work for shaping speaking skills showed the following results. The first descriptive question (“Has Facebook activity helped to improve your speaking skills?”) was asked about students’ general acceptance and perceptions on the use of FB in developing speaking skills. The research demonstrates that a rather big quantity of students (60%: 40% – Agree and 20% – Strongly agree) considered that FB helped them to improve speaking skills. Only 3% of students strongly rejected the benefits, 10% express disagreement to the efficiency of FB work. 27% of respondents hesitated about the advantages or disadvantages of FB activity for improving speaking skills.

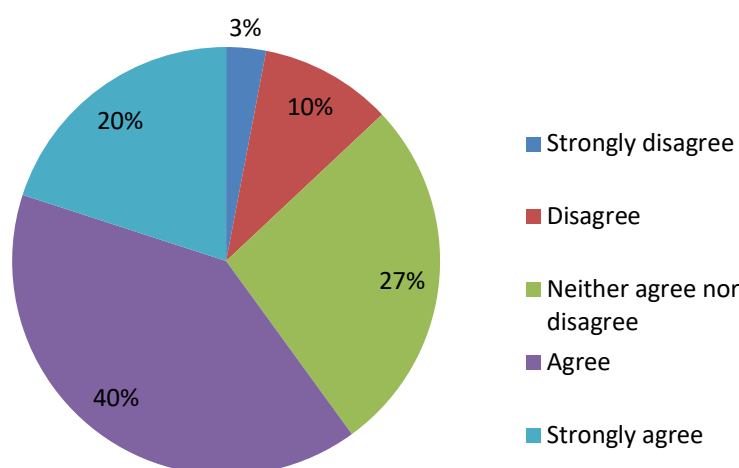
The participants indicated that learning via FB is more motivating. One student commented,

I liked the topic and the task we performed. It made me think and argue with the group.
(S1)

The students highlighted the convenience and easy access to materials, expressing the overall positive impression of the learning by FB but some of them found the speed of the studying process too high, stating *“I tried to make notes of all unknown words, but I didn’t manage. It’s difficult to watch the video, make notes, learn new words to perform the task.”* (S2)

Figure 6

Has Facebook Activity Helped to Improve Your Speaking Skills?

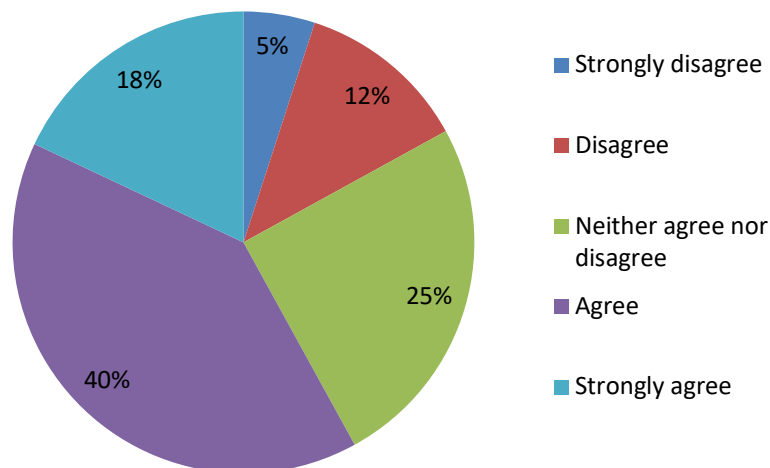


Questions 2-5 were aimed at investigating if separate English-speaking skills were successfully developed via the use of FB, according to the students’ opinion. These English speaking skills correspond to the basic speaking qualifications according to the CEFR and are the descriptors of evaluation of students’ strengths and weaknesses in speaking activities.

Question 2 (Have you increased your knowledge and skills of using legal vocabulary on familiar topics and specific grammar with the use of Facebook activity?) corresponded to the Grammar and Vocabulary Qualification. The result showed that 58 per cent of respondents (40% – Agree and 18% – Strongly agree) confirmed that they gained more knowledge in legal terminology and its use. The answers concerning this question revealed that although most students saw the benefits of FB use to achieve educational goals, 5% strongly disagreed to the increasing knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, while 25% were not sure about it. One participant commented that *“during the class we had the opportunity to increase our vocabulary with specific terms. If I didn’t know some expression I could immediately click on the word and look it up, and when I heard it several times, I already knew it.”* (S3). Another stated, *“I heard and tried to learn some words, but after the lesson, I had to work on my own to remember it. Otherwise, I forgot all of them.”* (S4)

Figure 7

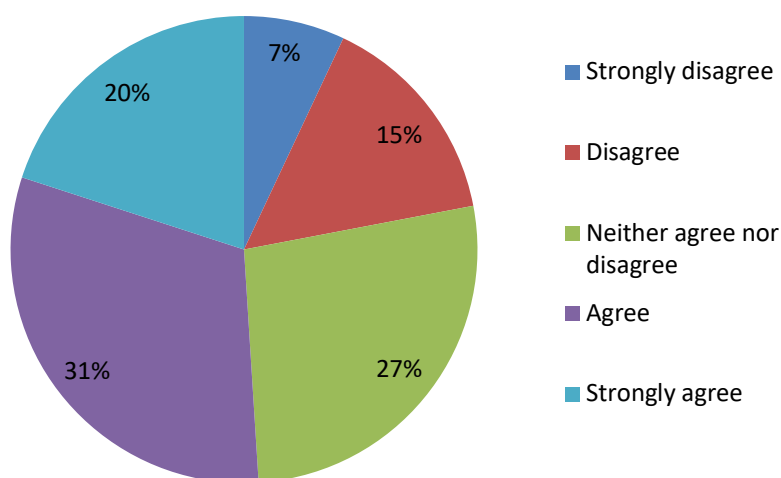
Have You Increased Your Knowledge and Skills of Using Legal Vocabulary on Familiar Topics and Specific Grammar with the Use of Facebook Activity?



Question 3 (Can you more easily produce extended spoken texts and contribute new information due to the use of FB activity? Can you more freely express your ideas?) corresponds to the Discourse Management Qualification. The rationale of this question was to figure out if students benefit from FB activities for better discourse management. The findings of this question revealed that 51% of the students approved that the FB tasks were likely to be efficient for developing production skills while 7% expressed the ineffectiveness. Fifteen % of the respondents also disagreed that they gained new skills due to the use of FB.

Figure 8

Can You More Easily Produce Extended Spoken Texts and Contribute New Information due to the Use of FB Activity?

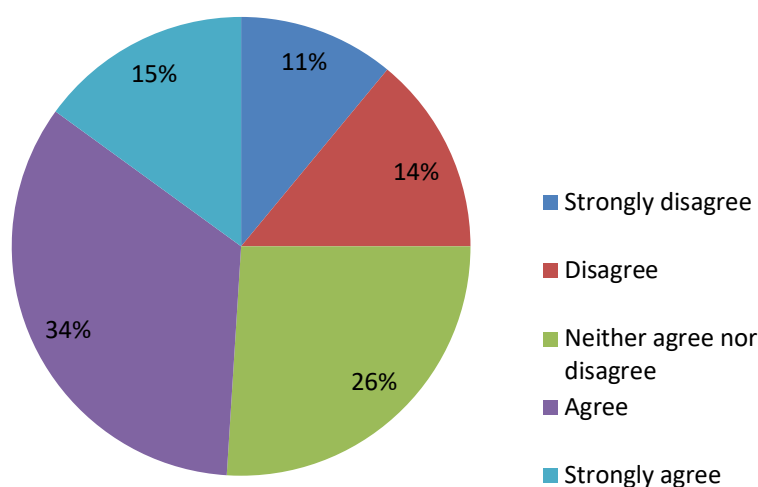


The interviewees expressed a preference of learning by means of FB, commenting that a more natural language environment made them learn faster, comprehend and remember various useful cohesion devices for more relevant and long speech, *“I isolated some ideas, tried to memorise the wording, and when I saw how I can comment and quickly respond to the replicas of others, I felt like a part of the discussion! I did it.”* (S4)

Question 4 (Can you receive and more easily exchange the information, communicate actively with others with the constant use of FB activity? Can you participate in spontaneous conversations on specific topics?) corresponded to the Interactive Communication Qualification. The results showed that 52% (34% – Agree and 18% – Strongly agree) believed that FB had a big impact on the students’ level of speaking. As the results displayed, 25% (11% – Strongly disagree and 14% – Disagree) of students indicated that FB activity had not helped them in developing interactive speaking abilities. The remaining 26% were not certain about the effectiveness of the work. The participants reported that they became more engaged, which made them participate in communication more freely, *“I found it really great to have the opportunity to discuss with friends about the topics that concern all of us. We use the net, we can learn and chat at the same time.”* (S5)

Figure 9

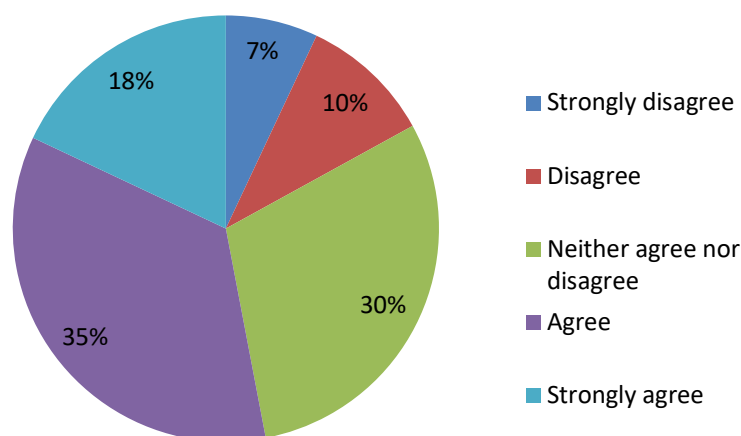
Can You Receive and More Easily Exchange the Information, Communicate Actively with Others with the Constant Use of FB Activity? Can You Participate in Spontaneous Conversations on Specific Topics?



Question 5 (Have you improved your pronunciation using FB tasks?) corresponded to the Pronunciation Qualification. It was designed to find out the students’ point of view about the connection between FB work and the improvement of pronunciation. The research showed that only 18% of the respondents definitely admitted the better results, 35% accepted the influence. The answers concerning this question revealed that not so many respondents – 7% strongly rejected the improvement in their pronunciation while 30% of them were uncertain about the impact.

Figure 10

Have You Improved Your Pronunciation Using FB Tasks?



The research showed that most students considered FB activity useful for the development of all four speaking qualifications. The increasing vocabulary and grammar knowledge for communication was indicated by the majority of informants. The more uncertain respondents were about the FB effectiveness for pronunciation. The students indicated that they could imitate the pronunciation of speakers and remember the intonation, *“It’s great to memorise the pronunciation when I hear it naturally in speech. I even can remember the voice!”* (S6)

Discussion and Limitations

This experiment-based research contributes to ascertaining the hypothesis on the usefulness of the FB environment as a flexible ubiquitous learning space for foreign language speaking skills development which is proved by the results. In this research, the authors are in alignment with the results of the recent research conducted by a number of scholars who verified the advantages of social media for ubiquitous learning mentioning that social media are “socially and participatory Web, in which users are not just content consumers but also content generators, often in a collaborative manner” (Li et al., 2016). Social media together with mobile learning provide learners with constant connectivity, foster collaborative learning, and enable authentic learning on the move (Gikas & Grant, 2013). Hasnine et al. (2020) stated that smartly generated learning contexts are significant for an intelligent ubiquitous learning environment. The importance of adaptation of a ubiquitous learning space employing its “plasticity” (flexibility) capacity by content and application filtering, polymorphic presentation, and content ranking was underlined by Bomsdorf (2005).

The significance of the networked nature of learning for the modern generation when students develop their personal learning network of human and academic resources stressed by the supporters of connectivism was taken into account in this study. Montebello and Camilleri (2018) stated that social media give the opportunity to connect, communicate, participate, and be productive and experience satisfaction from accomplishments in a highly accessible way. In higher education, the experience and maturity of students help to take better advantage of these possibilities. The findings of this research are also consistent with the studies of the positive effect of Facebook activities on enhancing oral communication skills by AlSaleem

(2018) and Barbosa (2017). During the preparation for the study, a large number of scientific studies were analysed that provided data on the effective use of Facebook for educational purposes, but there are also some works that demonstrate the shortcomings of using this platform. The negative aspects of the use of FB are the addiction and distraction of students' attention to the virtual content of social media. Some researchers also highlight the fact that students and pupils spend more time in the virtual world, and this negatively affects both learning and health behaviour (Lau, 2017; Singh, 2014; Abbasi et al, 2021) Summarising the negative impacts of Facebook use for education identified by various researchers, Nadeem (Nadeem, 2020) mentions Facebook addiction and lack of concentration in studies. The shortcomings of Facebook as a learning tool found by the scholars, present mostly psychological aspects, while only a few researches have been found to indicate the disadvantages of FB use for developing speaking skills. Namely, Kabilan et al. (2010), Omer et al. (2012), and Selwyn (2007) state that Facebook does not provide an acceptable environment for academic language teaching and learning, confusing those learners who are not mature enough to be aware of the difference between formal and informal language. Although some research cautions that students can employ unconventional language codes from Facebook (Nwala & Tamunobelema, 2019), this fact does not detract from the benefits of using this platform to develop speaking skills, as the current study shows.

Notwithstanding the merits of this study, some limitations must be identified. This study is limited by the implementation period (one semester). The research was conducted on the first-year students of the National Law University of Ukraine, thus the experiment does not present the results of all the population of the University.

Recommendations

Promotion of using the Facebook social network for academic purposes and scientific research can be useful in higher education. Educators should comprehend how students use social media technologies and then integrate them into students' lives concerning the matter of overcoming educational anxiety and assisting students facing challenges. The use of FB provides a unique perspective for ubiquitous learning and teaching outside the classroom as well, but the role of the teacher remains necessary for continuous instruction, explanation, commenting, and ratings. This issue should be further explained and investigated in terms of the amount of time necessary for such a project and how reasonable another investigation might be. Furthermore, the research could also be completed on how certain speaking activities could be performed with the use of Facebook. Another potential research study could pertain to how the other language skills such as reading, listening, and writing might be gained with the use of Facebook, and for which of them the use of social media is more beneficial. Future inquiry can also focus on the relationship between Facebook use and blended learning during pandemics and crises by applying the suggested model.

Conclusions

The present research shows that the Facebook group may be considered an effective learning space for speaking skills development. The suggested technique which employs the form of education that covers the principles of ubiquitous learning is quite efficacious, which is confirmed by statistical data obtained during the quasi-experiment and the survey of students. The achievement scores of the post-test assessing students' speaking skills showed a greater success of the experimental group in comparison with the control one in terms of expanding vocabulary, increasing English language grammar literacy, developing interactive skills,

discourse management and pronunciation. The authors suppose it can be explained by the permanent and immediate access to a variety of contexts and resources enriching learners with linguistic and contextual knowledge. Such a result can also be determined by a living authentic environment that makes it possible to organise task-oriented and contextual activities that stimulate students to research various problems, to express oneself more freely and creatively and to encourage communication. Also, Facebook space is used as a flexible learning environment that provides learners with different media resources, uploaded materials, links to various applications, and other social networking opportunities that help to correlate educational programme objectives with digital age learners' interests.

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The Utilisation of Peer-Assisted Learning/Mentoring and Translanguaging in Higher Education

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Abstract

The use of peer-assisted learning/mentoring (PALM) and translanguaging (TRL) as inclusive learning strategies to support students' transition into Higher Education and enhance their wellbeing in the post-Covid era has not been widely explored. Lecturers express their deep concern about the mental health issues and lack of confidence an increasing number of learners have faced lately in the UK due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of the present study, 80 undergraduate multilingual students were involved in PALM tasks during which they could use their first language through translanguaging and English, the target language, for one academic semester. The main goal was to ensure they had equal opportunities to develop their oral fluency while preparing group presentations. Paired T-tests were used to compare students' pre- to post-tests scores. In terms of this mixed-methods case study, the researcher also analyzed students' reflective reports and the anonymous feedback learners provided thematically to explore their attitudes. Findings indicated that these two approaches enabled students to improve their academic performance significantly although learners felt uneasy at the beginning. The combination of these two methods created a psychologically safe space as learners gradually developed a personal relationship with their peers. In response to the need for more information, as regards the use of PALM activities and TRL with multilingual learners, this study intends to contribute student voice since the inclusion of learner opinion has been minimal. Recommendations for the successful implementation of these two instructional approaches in undergraduate courses and suggestions for further research are provided.

Keywords: peer-assisted learning/mentoring, translanguaging, well-being, presentation skills, undergraduate students, inclusion

Higher Education (HE) has increasingly moved away from an elitist and exclusive mentality, focused on power and privilege claims, and towards a more egalitarian and inclusive mindset, based on justice and human rights claims (Blessinger & Stefani, 2017). In view of the call for Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to create support mechanisms to help learners adjust to university requirements, it is crucial to consider arguments that the majority of learners' failure or withdrawal tends to indicate challenges in adapting to the environment rather than learning difficulties (Haverila, Haverila & McLaughlin, 2020). Moreover, international students face additional problems as they speak English as a foreign/second or even third language (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017).

Peer Assisted Learning/Mentoring (PALM) has become prominent in educational learning and research (Hobson, 2020). It provides a setting for learners to work together while interacting and solving problems, reflecting on examples and the content of class sessions, and exchanging feedback (Hilsdon, 2014). PALM can be defined as an instructional intervention in terms of which learners interact with each other and depend on one another to enhance their understanding of the content of lectures and seminars and develop their autonomy as learners. Whilst PALM improves students' academic performance by fostering a deep approach to learning in which individual learners can develop high level cognitive capacities, it also offers the medium through which learners can increase their autonomy (Louden, McComb, Moore & Cole, 2019) offering and receiving emotional support.

The benefits of PALM as regards the enhancement of students' presentation skills and overall well-being have been chronicled by researchers (Hobson, 2020). The present research was conducted with the goal of examining the effectiveness of a well-developed university-based PALM intervention design to foster inclusivity and help the diverse student cohort, including low-achieving students and international students, at a University in the UK amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The research outcomes are expected to make an important contribution to the context field of language education by offering a rigorous assessment of the impact of the use of PALM as an inclusive learning technique in undergraduate practice (Beatty, Acar & Cheatham, 2021). Additionally, there are few studies which explore the combined use of translanguaging (TRL) and PALM as a means of promoting inclusion and supporting students' well-being in the post-COVID-19 era in HE (Di Sabato & Hughes, 2021).

This article intends to examine if the combined use of PALM and TRL, as inclusive learning strategies which promote equality and cooperation among learners in HEI, can improve undergraduate multilingual students' presentation skills and well-being even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. These strategies promote involvement as they allow more international students to engage actively with their peers. For instance, in terms of TRL, these learners can use words and phrases from their own mother tongue when they find it difficult to express their ideas in the target language. In terms of PALM, international students can be supported by local students, who can help them express their ideas more accurately, and, thus, become more confident. Consequently, these two approaches foster tolerance and inclusion for all learners, irrespective of their (linguistic) background. The study aspires to investigate the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of PALM and TRL on undergraduate multilingual students' oral fluency and presentation skills?
2. What are the attitudes of undergraduate multilingual students towards PALM and TRL?
3. What is the impact of PALM and TRL on multilingual students' wellbeing?

The remainder of the article will explore the latest literature regarding the use of PALM and TRL as inclusive learning strategies to enhance students' presentation skills and well-being with the anticipated outcome being to add to the body of information that addresses issues related to academic success for language learners especially in terms of the current pandemic (Tigert, Groff, Martin-Beltrán, Peercy & Silverman, 2019). Subsequently, the methodology of the study and its findings will be examined and discussed taking into consideration previous research findings. Finally, conclusions will be drawn, the limitations of this research study will be identified, and suggestions for further research as well as ideas for the effective application of PALM and TRL will be provided.

Literature Review

The Use of PALM and TRL in HE

PALM, as an educational and instructional method, has been present since Ancient Greek philosophers, like Socrates, began discussing their ideas in small groups. It refers to students' learning from and with students (Boud & Cohen, 2014). Collaborative learning has been considered as an important pedagogy in HE, as it paves the way for students to interact among themselves in small groups (Cabrera, Crissman, Bernal, Nora, Terenzini & Pascarella, 2002). Taking into consideration the multilingual and multicultural student cohorts in HEI nowadays, several studies have explored TRL, which is defined as the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named, usually national and state, languages (Otheguy, García & Reid, 2015, p. 281). This concept is increasingly influential in HE in English dominant contexts (Andrei, Kibler & Salerno, 2020). However, more studies on the pedagogical implications of combining TRL methods and PALM in HE are necessary, especially in situations where English is the main language of HE (Rodriguez, Musanti & Cavazos, 2021).

Several researchers have investigated the use of TRL to date. Fang and Liu (2020) explored the impact of TRL on multilingual students using a mixed-methods approach, together with classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and a questionnaire. They reported that learners held a neutral-to-positive stance towards TRL practices. Lecturers also recognised the efficacy of TRL for content learning as it seemed to enhance understanding, strengthen students' social relations, and improve learning for undergraduates with lower English competence. The study revealed that there was some discomfort with the application of TRL and exaggerated use of the mother tongue (L1). Despite the instability of L1 as a resource for subject learning, the researchers suggested that educators and students had to assume an open-minded plurilingual approach to language learning and teaching.

Moreover, Motlhaka and Makalela (2016) examined the use of TRL in a university writing class based on Bakhtin and Vygotsky's sociocultural framework on first year BA students in Education. They claimed that interactive instruction raised learners' awareness as they formed their own distinct voices in writing using compensation and various social techniques when they moved between L1 and L2 writing. Despite the small sample of the study, the researchers argued that TRL was a suitable framework for academic literacy and that it offered excellent conditions for interactive pedagogy in multilingual settings.

The Impact of PALM and TRL on Multilingual Students' Oral Fluency, Presentation Skills, and Wellbeing

The present study also aspired to explore the influence of PALM on students' presentations skills. Many modules in undergraduate courses require learners to prepare an oral presentation either alone or as part of a group. International and multilingual students often complain that interference from their L1 or from other languages they have mastered prevents them from preparing high-quality oral presentations (Denizer, 2017). They also confess that they do not understand the instructions of the tasks or the main concepts that they are asked to present and elaborate on (Meier, 2017).

PALM, when combined with TRL, seems to provide a viable solution to most of the problems that students encounter as they develop their understanding of the theory with the help of their peers finding support and useful advice regarding how to overcome the multiple barriers they face as multilingual learners (Caruso, 2018). Using their L1 also allows them to feel psychologically safe as they can resort to their L1 if they cannot think of a word or a phrase in the L2 (Charamba & Zano, 2019). Various researchers have reported their findings regarding the impact of TRL and PALM on learners' presentation skills but not amidst the COVID-19 crisis which has inflicted a heavy burden on students' mental health and overall wellbeing. Kohls, Baldofski, Moeller, Klemm and Rummel-Kluge (2021) reported that university students in Germany who participated in their study seemed to be vulnerable and suffer from elevated depressive symptoms due to the pandemic.

Furthermore, Mbirimi-Hungwe and McCabe (2020) used a "transcollab" model of teaching combining TRL and collaborative learning to support learners' understanding of academic concepts. The aim was to assist them to comprehend academic texts. Results showed that through collaborative learning, TRL can be used to improve plurilingual students' mastery of concepts. Although the study involved South African medical students only, the researchers argued that TRL can be utilized in cooperative learning tasks to enhance deeper understanding of the content, major theories and concepts.

Dalziel and Guarda (2021) also explored student TRL practices in the English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classroom at the University of Padova in Italy. In terms of this study, learners were invited to actively engage in group work or oral presentations, to unveil the possible use of spontaneous TRL practices. Despite the common belief in the benefits of an English-only approach, this study revealed that in many EMI classes both lecturers and students activate TRL practices. The researchers of this research confirmed that TRL is intended as the strategic use that multilingual speakers make of their entire linguistic range so as to facilitate the effective learning of content (Canagarajah & Said, 2011).

Additionally, Chester, Burton, Xenos, and Elgar (2013) examined the efficacy of a mentoring programme assisting the transition of first year undergraduates at a university in Australia. There were 241 first year students who participated in and provided data for the evaluation study. The researchers reported considerable positive change in three of the five aspects of learner success, with a significant increase in deep and strategic learning methods, and a reduction in surface learning. Although the effects demonstrated in this research could be the result of maturation, the outcomes indicate that proactive implementation in the first semester of the first year in a university setting can enhance crucial aspects of learning and wellbeing, lead to positive changes in academic self-efficacy and academic performance, and increase the success rate for undergraduate students.

As can be seen, there appear to be some gaps in the literature regarding the impact of PALM and TRL on undergraduate multilingual students' well-being and presentation skills (Back, Han & Weng, 2020). Although the use of PALM is associated with increased academic performance (Hodgson, Benson & Brack, 2015), more studies are necessary to explore the combined impact of PALM and TRL, when used as inclusive learning strategies with undergraduate language learners in HEI in the UK especially amidst crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Mbirimi-Hungwe & McCabe, 2020). The present study intends to add to the body of information that addresses issues related to academic success for language learners using a case study and data from anonymous student feedback, reflective reports and focus group discussions. It examined the use of PALM and TRL as innovative inclusive instructional techniques with undergraduate multilingual students in HEI and explored their impact on these learners' presentation skills and well-being amidst the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis.

Methodology

Participants

The study under consideration involved 80 multilingual students (Table 1), aged 19-27, who participated in well-structured PALM activities for an entire academic semester (12 weeks) and a lecturer who conducted this research. The goal was to develop learners' presentation skills, self-confidence, and oral fluency to perform well in their final assignment which was an individual oral presentation. The researcher received ethics approval from the university and informed consent from the students. Students had just joined the university after the COVID-19 pandemic and needed support as many of them either faced mental health issues or had caring responsibilities. Participants were multilingual and multicultural learners (i.e., students whose one parent was from Italy and the other from Poland) and were intimidated at the thought of presenting to an audience (Table 1).

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Students

| | Students | Frequency |
|--------|---|-----------|
| Gender | Male | 33 |
| | Female | 47 |
| Origin | Local students | 24 |
| | International students (i.e., French, Italian, Spanish, Polish) | 56 |

Students attended three one-hour classes per week. The instructor asked learners to offer anonymous feedback every 2-3 weeks through Mentimeter. Mentimeter is an online polling tool frequently used in education to increase classroom engagement and ensure that everyone's voice is heard (Ożadowicz, 2020). She also held focus group discussions with ten groups of eight students each time (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018) using the same prompt questions (Appendix A) to examine whether learners faced any challenges during the implementation twice with assessments during Weeks 4 and 8. These discussions provided valuable insights into the nature of problems that students faced during the implementation and allowed them to share their views and voice their concerns. The lecturer could then discuss and agree with the students on ways in which she could accommodate their needs taking her own restrictions into consideration.

For instance, as students complained about the lack of sufficient time to complete tasks, the lecturer provided an extension of one week. Moreover, since some learners indicated that they needed more time to interact with their peers, the lecturer also increased the time devoted to interaction in groups and pairs offering 15 additional minutes per week. Students were also encouraged to reflect on their own behaviour, such as their tendency to dominate conversations, and think of ways in which they could foster inclusion for all students and allow them to share their own ideas as well. Some students indicated that one of them could have the role of a timekeeper in his/her group to ensure that all learners participated in the conversations. The lecturer therefore made necessary changes responding to students' feedback to support all learners as much as possible, emphasizing inclusivity and providing equal opportunities for student progression and academic success. Participation in the discussions and the provision of feedback was optional, but learners engaged with enthusiasm.

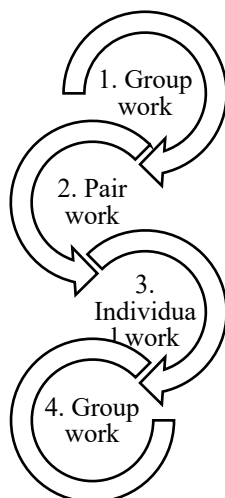
Although most PALM schemes involve the interaction of first year with more experienced learners such as third year students, the current research innovated by exploring the interaction of first year peers who mentor each other. The lecturer chose to have learners work in mixed-ability groups of 4 students in which there was at least one native English speaker who could provide linguistic support to the other students. Multilingual international learners were also encouraged to contribute more in terms of content and ideas and were allowed to use words or short phrases in their L1.

Instruments and Procedure

Students had to present on a specific topic of their choice which was different for each group as a pre-test in week 2. They were then engaged in bi-weekly oral presentation tasks for a total of 4. The groups of 4 were randomly assigned. Learners had to prepare 4 slides in their groups and present them to their peers and lecturer. As an observer, the researcher saw that learners first ensured that they understood the instructions for the task, then elaborated on the key concepts. They worked on a different topic every 2 weeks, and finally divided their work in half. Students then worked in pairs as they focused on 2 of the 4 slides. Afterwards, learners worked individually to complete their part of their work and then discussed their work in groups to finalise the slides they would use and decide how they would present them to the other groups (Figure 1).

Participants were encouraged to use their L1 when they worked in groups and pairs whenever they could not remember a word or a phrase in L2. However, their presentation was in English, and they had to use the L2 while presenting their work. The researcher played the role of the supervisor and moderator and made sure all students were supported and contributing equally to the tasks. Learners were encouraged to change groups every 2 weeks to network and receive feedback and support from different peers. After spending a year and a half in isolation, students needed more exposure to people and enjoyed interacting with peers while developing their oral fluency and presentation skills (Kohls et al., 2021). The lecturer was always present to resolve minor disagreements or misunderstandings. The overarching goal was to promote collaboration taking into consideration diverse students' learning styles (Mbirimi-Hungwe & McCabe, 2020).

Figure 1
Implementation of PALM Tasks



Students provided feedback to their peers after each presentation in the form of comments highlighting strengths and providing suggestions for further improvement. However, only the lecturer provided marks based on the assessment criteria (pre-test in week 2 and post-test in week 10). The lecturer explained the assessment criteria to the learners and provided support to ensure that the feedback was constructive and polite. The overarching goal was to enhance their academic performance and improve their engagement in the learning process.

At the end of the implementation, learners had to write a reflective report regarding their group experience. The lecturer analysed the content of students' anonymous feedback, focus group discussions, and final reflective reports to identify the strengths and potential challenges of this intervention. Learners participated in these tasks in a face-to-face setting, and the researcher collected field notes from observations to triangulate the data and increase the reliability of the data collected (Flick, 2018). The researcher analysed all data using thematic analysis (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017) to identify patterns in the data and use these themes to address the research. She also had an assistant who analysed 10% of the data, which were chosen randomly, to enhance the reliability of the analysis. The researcher and her assistant identified and agreed on themes which provided a response to the research questions of this research.

Results and Discussion

This section of the article is divided into three subsections. Each one presents and discusses the findings of this study in relation to the three research questions.

Impact on Students' Presentation Skills

The present study examined the impact of PALM and TL on students' presentation skills by comparing learners' post- versus pre-test scores (Table 2) (Hincks, 2003). Students had to present a set of 4 slides before and after the implementation of four PALM tasks in terms of which learners were allowed to use TL. The researcher provided a score based on the assessment criteria for all students' group presentations and a second assessor, an experienced lecturer, checked 20% of the presentations. She used the same marking criteria, and the interrater agreement was 90%, which is considered relatively high (Belotto, 2018).

Table 2
Students' Pre- and Post-test Scores

| | M | SD |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Pre-test | 29.88 | 14.99 |
| Post-test | 54.54 | 9.95 |
| Paired t-test (pre-vs post-test) | t (79) = 21.76, p < .05 | |
| Cohen's d | d = 1.93 | |

A paired t-test was conducted to explore students' progress (George & Mallery, 2016). This indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between learners' pre-test (M = 29.88, SD = 14.99, n = 80) and post-test (M = 54.54, SD = 9.95, n = 80) in their oral performance (t (79) = 21.76, p < .05). Cohen's effect size value (d = 1.93) suggested a "large" effect size and high practical significance for the enhancement of these students' oral presentation skills (Cohen et al., 2013). The findings of the study support the results of previous research which has explored the impact of these two approaches in isolation and reported their beneficial impact on students' academic performance (Dalziel & Guarda, 2021; Mbirimi-Hungwe & McCabe, 2020).

Perceived Benefits and Challenges of PALM and TL

In terms of the present research, several challenges and benefits related to the use of PALM and TL were identified and reported by most of the participants (Table 3).

Table 3
Benefits and Challenges of PALM and TRL

| Themes | Comments |
|--|--|
| PALM - Benefits | |
| 1. Collaboration / Help low-achieving and multilingual Ss | <i>'I love peer learning because interacting with the lecturer all the time is boring. I can also help friends who find it difficult to understand some words in English...we need to support them...they sometimes have wonderful ideas.'</i> |
| 2. Connections to personal experiences/ Reapplication of concepts | <i>'When I work with my peers, I can often find solutions to various challenges as we are able to link what we are doing to previous experience and find a way out...I can also reapply things I have learnt in the past and remember them.'</i> |
| 3. Building confidence | <i>'I feel well-supported by my peers...They respect me and always praise me when I share my ideas...I also feel more confident when I help others understand the theory...'</i> |
| 4. Space for fluent language use | <i>'At last, I can use my mother tongue and English without feeling I am doing something wrong...I feel like that with our lecturer.'</i> |
| 5. Reflection/challenge of language use | <i>'When I talk with my peers, I can challenge their ideas as I can interact freely using my own language as well...I do not have to use English all the time...This allows me to express my ideas better ...'</i> |
| PALM - Challenges | |
| 6. Group formation/group dynamics | <i>'Some students want to dominate the conversation...they are not patient enough to allow other people to state their points of view.'</i> |
| 7. Time | <i>'We have so little time to complete the task...we need an extension of the deadline.'</i> |
| 8. Misunderstandings | <i>'Sometimes, students do not pay attention when we explain what each one of us needs to do...we then have to spend more time to clarify things...'</i> |

PALM = Peer-assisted learning/mentoring

| TRL* - Benefits | |
|--|---|
| 9. Clarification of concepts | <i>'It is so difficult to understand certain theories in English, but my peers use words in own language and help me clarify the concepts...they revoice my ideas in the target language...I can see the light at the end of the tunnel...'</i> |
| 10. Exchange of knowledge | <i>'In the past, I used to keep quiet as I did not understand half of the things my lecture telling us and no one could help me...Now, I am able to work with my friends, either pairs or in groups, and we can exchange ideas...'</i> |
| 11. Transcend linguistic and cultural barriers | <i>'I am so happy that I do not have to talk only to my Italian friends as they were the ones who could understand me. I can now interact with peers with different cultural backgrounds and use words from various languages...it is so exciting...'</i> |
| 12. Peer Support/Mentoring/ "ubuntu" | <i>'We know that we must support each other as we depend on one another for this assignment. We are in this together...so, we help our friends when they are strugglin ...'</i> |
| 13. Construction of knowledge | <i>'When we do not understand a concept, we exchange ideas until it is clear for all of us...we provide our own interpretations, and we reach an agreement...'</i> |
| TRL* - Challenges | |
| 14. Lack of time | <i>'We need more time to explain things to our friends in their own language...it is not t t simple, but it is extremely rewarding as everyone is on the same boat...no one is left behind'</i> |
| 15. Difficulties of code-switching | <i>'Sometimes, I get slightly confused, but we joke about this...it is part of the game...'</i> |
| 16. Misunderstanding | <i>'We do not always know exactly what some words mean in another language...therefore, we sometimes make mistakes, but we correct them along the way...'</i> |

TRL* = translanguaging

The researcher tried to create TRL spaces for teaching and learning using PALM to allow students to interact freely with each other. Learners chose the language they preferred as they jointly reflected, exchanged ideas, and used language to enhance their understanding of both the content and tasks of the current module drawing on their linguistic repertoire and cultural background (Table 3). The lecturer made the strategic instructional decision to explain content in the L2 but allowed students to further explain and elaborate on the basic concepts and the instructions of the various tasks using words and phrases from other languages as well. She also allowed the more proficient students who were native speakers to help their peers by restating their comments. High-achieving students could therefore benefit from low-achieving students' ideas and contributions. They helped them improve their linguistic performance in the L2, while less proficient students also felt appreciated for their input.

International students then overcame their hesitations and were able to make explicit connections between concepts and vocabulary development in both L1 and L2 (Table 3). Fluid language use was modelled and encouraged, and learners felt psychologically safe to share their thoughts after being in isolation for quite some time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They were encouraged to use their multilingualism naturally and fluidly. This turned these sessions into a playful game and allowed even the shyest students to overcome their reservations and engage in the interactions contributing to the main tasks. Learners built their confidence as they felt safe to display their multilingualism and enhance their learning drawing on their multilingual/ multicultural background when discussing academic concepts and ideas for their group presentations. In this TRL festival, learners were allowed to voice their ideas in L1 and then translate them in the L2 validating students' multilingual skills and bridging all languages in an academic context.

Students did not laugh at each other but came to their peers' rescue. This reminded learners of the notion of ubuntu (Table 3) which Makalela (2016) first reported. Students felt they needed each other to understand the theory and the task to prepare their presentations no matter which language they had to use to reach their goal. For them, it was natural and even amusing to move

from one language to another, while preparing their presentations in English. Successful communication, negotiation of meaning, and active interaction among students were not hindered by TRL. Learners felt relieved as they did not have to admit their shortcomings in their lecturer's presence (García, 2012; García & Wei, 2014; Makalela 2016). Monolingual interaction was a thing of the past. International education necessitates the fluid movement of languages (Makoni, 2017) and proposes that students should transcend linguistic boundaries to grasp meaning. The researcher promoted a series of collaborative activities in terms of which learners shared and exchanged knowledge to prepare their group tasks (Table 3) and their final individual presentations.

During the group and pair interactions, students often resorted to English when there were misunderstandings due to the use of various languages. Ultimately, English was used as a resource to enhance the understanding of the theory and the instructions for the task (Table 3). Learners could make sense of the concepts and guidance for the task in whichever language they found more convenient, and they could then use English more confidently (Makalela, 2016; Mbirimi-Hungwe & Hungwe, 2018). Native English speakers could also learn new words and gain insights into exciting new cultures. They were then able to understand their peers better and work more effectively in terms of the task (Table 3). They all knew that they would have to work with people from various countries in the future, and this was the perfect opportunity for them to start developing their intercultural and multilingual awareness. Students also knew that they needed each other to complete the task successfully. They all contributed equally as some peers provided explanations in some learners' L1, others shared their innovative ideas, and some even offered technical support to improve their presentations. The combination of TRL and PALM allowed learners to understand the theory using various linguistic repertoires. This highlighted the interrelatedness of languages and the value of peer support as students - acting as mentors and mentees - were able to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries to help their peers and support them when they faced challenges in terms of the L2 or the task itself (Table 3). The fact that all students completed the task successfully in the L2 without complaints, major misunderstandings or conflicts indicated that learners should be allowed to interact in whichever language they found appropriate for learning (Heugh, 2014).

Although several educators still insist that using many languages creates confusion (García, 2012), students in the present research were able to negotiate meaning and complete their tasks successfully without their lecturer's intervention. Possibly the interrelatedness, exposure, and appreciation of other languages and the joy of interacting with peers (Table 3) and supporting each other to reach a final learning goal, after a period of physical and mental isolation due to COVID-19 pandemic, were two of the reasons which may explain why the combination of these two instructional techniques proved to be helpful for these students who faced various barriers, linguistic, mental, and educational.

As English is the language for business and employment (Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2019), it is frequently used as the medium of instruction globally. This puts international and multilingual learners at a disadvantage as they need additional teaching support to learn the concepts in the L2. However, if students are allowed to negotiate meaning through peer learning/mentoring and understand the main theories and instructions of the different tasks through the use of different languages, they could then contribute to their groups and master the main concepts as they improve their mastery of the L2 (Table 3).

In terms of the present research, it was surprising to observe learners as they used phrases in various languages keeping English as the central language of communication (Table 3). Moving easily from one language to the other enabled all students to feel included as the combination of PALM and TRL widened learners' participation and engagement in the learning tasks. The PALM and TRL implementation scheme also catered for all students' learning styles as learners were involved in group, pair, and individual work. This facilitated not only deep learning, and self-reliance, but also support and inclusion for all students (Table 3). Learners were also encouraged to interact, negotiate meaning, and reflect on a variety of key concepts as they engaged in the preparation of their group presentations developing a variety of skills, but most of all their oral fluency. They defied all barriers imposed by their diverse linguistic and cultural background and promoted equal participation and inclusion of all learners irrespective of their background.

Students indicated that the lecturer should play the role of the supervisor and facilitator allowing learners to develop their skills and improve their academic performance by realising the value of interdependence and interconnectedness of learners as they tried to make sense of the world and their own learning (Table 3). This intervention allowed them to become who they wanted to be by developing their autonomous and collaborative skills. Therefore, they first interacted with their peers and clarified the concepts and the tasks in groups, then in pairs and finally were allowed to work autonomously and reflect on their previous experience as they completed their individual tasks. Students were thus able to work and carry their peers with them during these collaborative activities in which learners continuously changed roles (mentors vs mentees) and languages with the ultimate goal of engaging all students in the preparation of their presentations after clarifying the theory and the task at hand. The affective side of this task was clear as learners enjoyed this interdependence placing emphasis on the collective good which also allowed them to complete their assignment successfully.

Although previous studies stress the importance of peer learning/mentoring as a highly valued academic practice (Hilsdon, 2014), educators still face some challenges in terms of group composition, time required, and misunderstandings (Table 3) which need to be addressed to maximize the mediating role of the collaborative activity. If groups and pairs, comprising students with varying degrees of content and language mastering, share the common goal of completing a group presentation or helping one another to grasp the module content, this promotes constructive interaction and eventually facilitates subject matter understanding. While mentoring relations in this study revealed a contribution to enhanced subject matter understanding, they sometimes made certain students dependent on peers more than was appropriate. In this case, the use of group, pair, and individual work discouraged learners' overdependence on their peers.

Perceived Impact of PALM and TRL on Student Well-Being

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, HE students' lives and learning conditions have changed dramatically. Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) states that the basic psychological needs for competence, independence, and relatedness represent core conditions for personal growth, integration, social development, and psychological well-being as empirical studies have also indicated (Riggenbach, Amouroux, Van Petegem, Tourniaire, Tonelli, Wiener, Hofer & Antonietti, 2019). Moreover, the satisfaction of basic psychological needs can act as a buffer in times of stress, reducing appraisals of anxiety and promoting adaptive coping (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). To enable personal growth, intrinsic motivation, and psychological well-being, satisfaction of basic psychological needs has been

increasingly taken up and promoted in the educational context with SDT acting as a framework for interventions (Lüftenegger, Klug, Harrer, Langer, Spiel & Schober, 2016).

The students in the current study indicated that the combination of the two approaches improved their self-confidence (Table 3) satisfying their need for competence which refers to experiencing one's behaviour as effective. For example, learners felt competent when they were able to meet the requirements of their studies. This also satisfied their need for autonomy (Table 3) which refers to experiencing one's behaviour as volitional and self-endorsed. For instance, these learners felt autonomous when they willingly devoted time and effort to the completion of their group presentation. Finally, the need for relatedness refers to feeling connected with and experiencing mutual support from significant others (Niemic & Ryan, 2009) which was the core goal of the research since inclusivity was promoted by enabling all students to strive to reach their full potential.

The current study contributes in terms of the need for HEI to improve learners' quality of life in various ways as they need not only to impart knowledge, but also to develop the whole student by providing opportunities for personal growth and fulfilment. Therefore, students need a range of transversal skills such as complex and autonomous thinking, creativity, and effective communication (Succi & Canovi, 2020). As social spaces, enabling social interaction, HEI must offer learners opportunities for formal and informal networking allowing students to feel that they belong (Table 3) and helping them unfold their potential (Tonon, 2020). This was incredibly difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the disruption it caused representing an unprecedented challenge for students' quality of life and thriving.

As HEI resorted to distance education as an emergency response to the pandemic, the lack of physical presence and the lesser extent of informal discourse and spontaneous interaction created a communication gap which caused negative emotions, gaps in understanding, and misconceptions. To counteract these responses, it is crucial to explicitly address learners' individual needs, feelings, and difficulties and promote interaction among learners and relatedness which contributes to psychological wellbeing (Olsson, McGee, Nada-Raja & Williams, 2013). These were supported by the present scheme (Table 3).

The current research reveals that these practices enhance learners' emotional well-being alleviating language learning anxiety, reducing negative behaviour, and promoting social justice through equity in education (Table 3). These two practices have resulted in giving back voice to multilingual, multicultural (Anderson & Cowart, 2012; Lehtomäki, Moate & Posti-Ahokas, 2016), and low-achieving students (Table 3), transforming cognitive structures by fostering language fluidity, raising well-being and attainment levels, and eventually transforming an unequal classroom into a more just educational space. The researcher's efforts in part legitimize PALM and TRL Education for Social Justice agenda which allows universities to become places for releasing subjectivities, ensuring well-being, and decolonizing society as they promote inclusivity and equality of opportunity for all learners irrespective of their background.

Provided that multilingual learners often show lower educational attainment when compared with their monolingual peers for whom English is their first language (Duarte & Gogolin, 2013), these students are refrained from using their full linguistic repertoires and thus constrained in learning and expression (García & Wei, 2014). Since the lack of attention to students' home languages has been repeatedly described as possibly having far-reaching negative effects, TRL pedagogy is presented as a unique approach through which diverse

learners may use all their languages in formal education (Table 3), despite teachers not knowing those languages (García & Wei, 2014). The benefits are even better when it is combined with PALM which facilitates the whole procedure placing TRL in an extremely supportive framework.

The simultaneous use of PALM and TRL closes the gap among students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and allows learners to recognise and use linguistic and cultural diversity as a resource for learning. This can help all students prepare for globally connected societies and changing working styles (García & Wei, 2014). The current study addresses calls from practitioners about ways in which TRL can be successfully implemented in education (Canagarajah & Said, 2011). The use of these two approaches allowed learners in the present research to make cross-linguistic friendships (Table 3) as multilingualism and multiculturalism were promoted increasing students' motivation and positive attitudes towards learning (Günther-van der Meij, Duarte & Nap, 2018). There is a clear link between the use of TRL and PALM and learners' social-emotional well-being. Students indicated that they enjoyed making new friends and working closely with them, especially after almost 2 years of isolation (Table 3). TRL and PALM reduced individual differences between students and helped them deal with negative emotions such as feeling mad or sad about not being able to improve their academic performance.

It is noteworthy that the current study indicated that the combined use of PALM and TRL may offer various benefits to university students, including mentor modelling, strategy knowledge, and spontaneous strategy use. These seem to have a positive impact on learners' academic progress, language development, engagement, and social-emotional well-being. TRL and peer learning/mentoring were used effectively by students in the present research as they utilized them for specific and meaningful reasons, such as academic success and well-being. This led to the development of all learners up to a certain degree, depending on their individual learning styles.

Recommendations and Conclusion

PALM and TRL have been “hot topics” in HE for quite some time in terms of their relevance for students, lecturers, and educational institutions internationally. While PALM research has grown exponentially with the increasing focus on the social aspects of teaching and learning, the notion of TRL is currently widely used when responding to multilingual students' needs in the increasingly plurilingual universities (García & Lin, 2017). The present study aspired to explore the impact of PALM and TRL on learners' academic performance and well-being and add to the existing literature. It has some limitations as it implemented these two approaches with university students only, for a limited amount of time, and without explicitly training learners in peer learning/mentoring strategies. Moreover, the researcher could use additional ways of eliciting feedback from the students, possibly in the form of diaries, and involve more lecturers in the intervention so as to explore additional challenges of the combined use of these two strategies.

Despite its limitations, the current research promoted “translanguaging to construct meaning” instead of forming barriers for learning and relying upon peers as “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 2007, p. 74) as yet another successful strategy to support international and/or local students in the UK deal with the challenges of HE studies in a second or foreign language of instruction. Apparently, the use of more than one language in HEI potentially assists rather than diminishes the development of academic discourse (Van der Walt & Dornbrack, 2011). Languages are

vehicles through which learners grasp and make sense of the content to convert information into knowledge. The use of a language that students are conversant with to clear up any kind of confusion is revealed to be a common practice in HEI.

Consequently, if the aim of teaching is to facilitate knowledge acquisition, then students could use any language that would be conducive to knowledge acquisition for as long as it is possible, as was the case with the current intervention. Sticking to the use of a language that constitutes a barrier to knowledge acquisition, as is sometimes the case when only English is permitted in a class, would undermine the facilitating role of peers, who can act as mentors, since the learning sessions would be less productive in terms of knowledge acquisition. Thus, drawing upon languages used by learners to facilitate knowledge acquisition in terms of peer work is revealed to be one of the strategies that students believe leads to enhanced comprehension (Table 3).

Taking into consideration the findings of the present study, we could recommend that educators should be involved in professional development training seminars/courses and create communities of practice with colleagues to share best practice and challenges they may face in terms of the implementation of PALM and TRL in their classes. Practitioners need to carefully plan and supervise relevant activities, but also allow some space for spontaneity and flexibility always taking their learners' specific needs and mood into consideration. They should also invite more knowledgeable colleagues to mentor them and discuss the challenges they may be facing.

Additionally, HEI should consider training their staff to help them adopt these practices more widely because their consistent use by educators can increase multilingual students', often the majority in many HEIs in the UK, comprehension, support their language and academic development, and encourage their socio-emotional well-being. The present research indicated that PALM and TRL can act as scaffolds for multilingual students' emotional well-being minimising learning anxiety and behavioural issues, and allowing emotional scaffolding (Park, 2014) in addition to improving acquisition of content.

These findings emphasize the link between emotion and cognition, highlighting the role of positive affect in increasing classroom engagement (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012). They speak to the power that anxiety holds among learners and provide further evidence of the ability of TRL and PALM strategies to alleviate some of this stress and increase interaction. Hopefully, these findings will further encourage educators to dedicate time and space to emotional and cognitive scaffolding with a combination of these two approaches. It can be anticipated that future research will continue to delve into the power of TRL and PALM for students in primary, secondary and tertiary education in the UK and globally.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

1. How do you feel about using PALM in your classes?
2. How do you feel about using TRL in your classes?
3. Based on your experience, can you name any benefits of PALM? Can you elaborate on them? If there are no benefits, can you possibly tell us why you think PALM is not beneficial for your learning?
4. Based on your experience, can you name any benefits of TRL? Can you elaborate on them? If there are no benefits, can you possibly tell us why you think TRL is not beneficial for your learning?
5. Are there any challenges regarding the use of PALM in your classes?
6. Are there any challenges regarding the use of TRL in your classes?
7. Are there any suggestions for improvement for the use of PALM in your classes?
8. Are there any suggestions for improvement for the use of TRL in your classes?
9. Would you like to use PALM in the future?
10. Would you like to use TRL in the future?

Factors Obstructing English Teaching Effectiveness: Teacher Voices from Thailand's Deep South

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Abstract

Administering English language teaching (ELT) in rural settings of the three southern border provinces has been challenging for both teachers and learners due to two decades of political unrest, eruptions of violence, fears, and insecurity. To enhance ELT, this study aimed to investigate factors affecting the ineffectiveness of ELT in these three educational environments and introduce a new lens of contextualized English instructions for learners in schools located in Southernmost Thailand, where learners live amid linguistic and cultural diversity. In this qualitative study, data were collected from teachers operating in two schools of each province (totaling six institutions) by semi-structured interviews and analyzed by content analysis. Findings revealed that five primary factors deteriorating English language learning efficiency in the three southern border provinces were Implementation of Broad-Spectrum ELT Policies; Insufficient Teaching Integrations with Islamization; Inadequate Awareness of the Significance of English; Inconsistencies between ELT Textbooks and the Sociolinguistic Reality of English; and Impractical Classroom Arrangement. The findings could be beneficial if they are further utilized by the Ministry of Education in establishing policies for ELT in specific contexts as well as school administrators and teachers in formulating instructional approaches, managing learning resources, and arranging classrooms based on local needs and identities. Although this study has a specific spatial scope, which is the three southern border provinces of Thailand, its findings can be adapted for a broader application as a part of the global perspective and a clue to solve language learning problems across ELT communities encountering a similar challenge.

Keywords: English language teaching, private Islamic schools, rural education, 21st-century education

The number of people utilizing English as a global language has been significantly growing, especially among non-native speakers with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, many nations, including Thailand, have policies to prioritize the uplifting of English language proficiencies as part of their human resources development processes towards cultivating 21st-century global citizenship (Baker & Fang, 2020). In Thailand, where this study was conducted, although most learners in Thailand are exposed to compulsory ELT from primary to higher education, learners' English language mastery remained unsatisfactory compared to those in neighboring countries in the region, such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. According to Education First (2020), Thai citizens' average level of English proficiency ranked 89th from 100 non-native English-speaking countries worldwide and 20th from 24 countries in Asia. As evident in past years, this discovery also confirmed that Thailand remained below average compared to its neighbors such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Singapore. Although several studies had addressed ELT problems and challenges in Thailand (Imsa-ard, 2020; Putri, 2020; Somjai, & Soontornwipast, 2020), the contexts of private Islamic schools, especially in the Deep South region or the three southern border provinces, including Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat, were uninvestigated. Compared to the general demographics of Thailand, Deep South is a unique region because most students are Muslim, living with the Islamic culture. Furthermore, they use Malay as the first language and primary language in everyday communication and use Thai and English as the second and third languages, respectively. Considering this uniqueness and the limited number of studies on the context, ELT problems in deep south private Islamic schools are worth exploring.

Hence, this study primarily aimed to examine problems and needs that ELT teachers had while teaching in deep south private Islamic schools with contextual uniqueness. Results were projected to offer beneficial insights into practical and strategic teaching development. The insights would be especially fruitful to teachers and administrators in charge of ELT in private Islamic schools seeking to foster pedagogical quality, reconceptualize ELT processes for a 21st-century education, and emphasize skill development for students rather than content deliveries (Fang & Baker, 2018; Fang & Ren, 2018; Meyer & Norman, 2020). With a deeper understanding, the provision of ELT that recognizes local and global dynamics is expected to prepare students more effectively for 21st-century global citizenship and equip them with relevant skills and readiness to survive in modern society with fair living quality.

Literature Review

ELT in Thailand

Since the world has witnessed a notable increase of English language users and learners every year, English has become a global and primary lingua franca for many users across cultures (Baker & Fang, 2020; Galloway, 2017; Galloway & Rose, 2018, 2021; Rose & Galloway, 2017, 2019; Rose, McKinley, & Galloway, 2021). Based on this phenomenon, schools in many countries, including Thailand, subsequently added ELT to their curriculum to ensure that human resources are prepared for future English communication in learning and professional environments. Although English is not an official language in Thailand, ELT courses are compulsory and provided from elementary to tertiary levels of education (Khamkhien, 2010; Methitham & Chamcharatsri, 2011). English has become even more essential to Thai citizens after Thailand officially joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. Within the new AEC sphere, professionals can now work closer together regardless of sovereign borders, and there is no exception for Thai citizens. To convey messages in multicultural settings, AEC members use English as a lingua

franca when they work, commute to places, receive education, and share social spaces with others in ASEAN (Kirkpatrick, 2010; Zein & Stroupe, 2018). To address the emerging needs for enhancing English proficiency, there has been a constantly growing demand worldwide for English language education, as English literacy is key to success in the globalized world.

To cultivate Thai students as global citizens and offer them access to fair quality of a future life, English is a gateway to achieving these goals. Hence, to equip Thai students with English language competencies, the Thai Ministry of Education has injected lump sums of funding to educational institutions across the country and required them to organize English language development projects for students and teachers over the past years, including domestic and offshore English language training and boot camps. Nevertheless, the outcomes have been far from satisfying. Grubbs, Chaengploy, and Worawong (2009) and Phungphol (2005) pointed out that a factor promoting positive ELT outcomes and English language development for students is the choice of instructional approach. Similarly, the current obstructing factor of ELT in Thailand is the dominance of a traditional teaching approach, known as “chalk and talk.” This instructional method is substantially teacher-centered and lecture-based. Students are expected to memorize content for examination. Exchanges of ideas in class are minimal or not encouraged. Those who are good listeners are viewed as behaviorally desirable. They are also expected to jot down notes from verbal lectures but not to interrupt by raising questions. Nevertheless, education in the 21st century has changed considerably, and today’s ELT styles do not resemble many features of changing educational models.

ELT in Thai Private Islamic Schools

This study was conducted at private Islamic schools, educational institutions known to have played a critical role in developing the Muslim society of ASEAN for a long time, such as in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Thailand, and Singapore (Margono, 2012). Most private Islamic schools in Thailand are geographically located towards the South, especially in Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat. Currently, several of these private Islamic schools are providing secular-Islamic curriculum. Muslim parents in the Deep South prefer admitting their children to these schools because Islamic and secular courses are offered together. In terms of ELT performances, it is essential to note that private Islamic schools did not take a conventional approach in providing education, and overall English language scores have been unsatisfactory, as evident in the lower average score on the annual national examination than those of other regions in Thailand (National Institute of Educational Testing Service, 2017). To this issue, Binmadnee, Abdulsata, and Haji (2018) explored ELT problems in higher secondary education provided by private Islamic schools in the Deep South and revealed many findings. For instance, it was reported that the ELT courses offered in the Deep South did not address local needs, promote learning, or serve as a tool, such as a language training laboratory, that facilitates effective teaching and learning. Furthermore, the implemented learning activities were inconsistent with modern learning strategies. The teaching also lacked supplemental learning materials and up-to-date measurements. Furthermore, teachers lacked the desirable qualifications and traits of highly qualified language educators. Similarly, Srisueb and Wasanasomsithi (2010) assessed ELT problems that students of private Islamic schools in Narathiwat encountered and suggested that attitudes were reportedly a barrier. More specifically, the students did not believe that English was an essential language for them because it had minimal useful implications in daily life. Another problem that these students encountered was learning difficulties. For instance, the students felt that English grammatical rules were excessively complex. In addition, they also indicated that they struggled to form English sentences when writing, pronounce specific English words, and listen for main ideas.

Due to budget constraints, many schools in the three southern border provinces did not have suitable teaching materials. The situation has made the provision of ELT courses challenging and ineffective while unnecessarily slowing down the students' development of English proficiencies. Therefore, it is urgently necessary for the school administrators and teachers to jointly plan and design English language development policies and align their curriculum and instructional models with the development of 21st-century skills.

Moreover, Assalihee, Boonsuk, Bakoh, and Sano (2019) synthesized ASEAN schools' administrative and teaching models from administrators and teachers in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore and discovered guidelines for maneuvering 21st-century ELT in private Islamic schools, which included considering new roles and duties of teachers; emphasizing proactive and cooperative learning; integrating technology in education; associating with local learning resources; integrating the science of learning with other types of sciences; and designing a new 21st-century learner assessment model. The study also suggested that educational stakeholders value and recognize contextual differences, including learners' geographical locations and cultural diversity, to genuinely address learners' needs. This notion is especially applicable to the Deep South of Thailand, which is where most locals are Malay Muslims who share different linguistic and cultural identities from most of the learners across Thailand. The diversity among learners' identities is crucial, and educational stakeholders in ELT must consider the identity mosaic when planning for school administration, designing teaching management, formulating policies, and drafting curriculum. To address the research gap and identify root causes of failure in the administration of ELT in the three southern border provinces, this study aimed to answer the research question:

1. What factors are obstructing ELT efficiency in the three southern border provinces of Thailand?"

Research Methodology

Research Contexts and Participants

The Deep South was chosen as this study's spatial scope due to its unique identities shaped by locals with distinctive ethnicities such as Malay and religious beliefs such as Islam compared with the majority of the Thai population. As a result, the Deep South is a region filled with private Islamic schools offering blended secular-Islamic curriculum. Furthermore, since the area is bordered by Malaysia, many locals are bilingual who can communicate in Thai and Malay. Based on these facts, this spatial context is particularly noteworthy to explore how English language education is administered as a third language.

This study employed a qualitative approach. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with 18 key informants, including lower English teachers in six private Islamic schools in the Deep South of Thailand. Breaking down the number, three key informants were selected from each of the six schools. Furthermore, two of these schools were purposively selected from each of the three southern border provinces, including Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, given that the schools must 1) have obtained 2020's mean national achievement test score in English Language and Communication lower than the national mean, which is 33.67/100 (National Institute of Educational Testing Service, 2020), 2) have been established for at least ten years and provided English language education throughout their existence, and 3) possess an official status as a private Islamic school under the Office of the Private Education Commission, Ministry of Education. Similarly, purposive sampling (Cohen, Manion, &

Morrison, 2018; Creswell, 2013) with specific inclusion criteria were used to select the key informants based on the research aims. The English teachers were included based on their qualifications in ELT, teaching experiences of more than ten years, teaching duties at the lower secondary level of no less than 15 periods a week, and records of teaching students in multiple grades from Lower Secondary to Upper Secondary, which is as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Teachers' Demographics

| Teachers (T) | Site (S) | Age | Genders | Education background | Years of teaching experience | No. of teaching hours |
|--------------|----------|-----|---------|--|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| T1 | S1 | 36 | F | BEd in English | 13 | 18 |
| T2 | S1 | 42 | F | BEd in English | 20 | 18 |
| T3 | S1 | 43 | F | BEd in English | 20 | 19 |
| T4 | S2 | 33 | M | BA in English & Dip. in Teaching | 10 | 16 |
| T5 | S2 | 33 | F | BE in Islamic Studies, International Program | 10 | 18 |
| T6 | S2 | 52 | F | BEd in English | 30 | 19 |
| T7 | S3 | 35 | F | BEd in English | 12 | 15 |
| T8 | S3 | 33 | F | BA in English | 10 | 18 |
| T9 | S3 | 37 | M | BEd in English & MEd in School Admin. | 14 | 18 |
| T10 | S4 | 40 | F | BEd in English & MEd in School Admin. | 15 | 16 |
| T11 | S4 | 32 | F | BEd in English | 11 | 19 |
| T12 | S4 | 33 | F | BEd in English | 10 | 18 |
| T13 | S5 | 56 | F | BEd in English | 25 | 17 |
| T14 | S5 | 34 | F | BEd in Business English & Dip. in Teaching | 11 | 19 |
| T15 | S5 | 33 | F | BEd in English | 10 | 18 |
| T16 | S6 | 34 | F | B.A. in English & Dip. in Teaching | 11 | 18 |
| T17 | S6 | 34 | F | BEd in English | 11 | 19 |
| T18 | S6 | 33 | F | BEd in English | 10 | 15 |

Data Collection and Analysis

In the initial phase, relevant school administrators were contacted and asked to allow data to be collected and interviews to be conducted with their teachers. The selected teachers were also

contacted and asked if they would like to voluntarily contribute to the research by interviewing. After enough key informants were obtained based on the criteria, consent forms were given out for the interviewees to sign. Subsequently, interview schedules were set, including dates, times, and venues at the interviewees' convenience.

The three main questions used in this study were formulated based on a study related to ELT in private Islamic schools (Binmadnee et al., 2018). Essentially, the developed questions were 1) What are the current situations of ELT in private Islamic schools? 2) What are critical factors affecting the effectiveness of ELT management in private Islamic schools? 3) What are required or needed for teachers to teach English in the context of private Islamic schools? In addition, three probing questions were also prepared and only asked when further clarification was needed from the interviewees. More specifically, the questions included 1) How is teaching English in private Islamic schools different from other schools? 2) Who are the current primary obstacles in ELT? Are they the teachers, students, school administrators, or public agencies? 3) What action needs to be taken as urgently as possible to maximize the effectiveness of ELT in private Islamic schools? All the questions were assessed by three experts to improve item-objective congruence. Adjustments were subsequently made following their feedback. Eventually, pilot interviews were conducted with three English teachers who were not the key informants to find out whether these questions were accurate, on point, and provided meaningful results so that they could be further implemented in the formal interviews.

Before each interview session, the interviewees were asked for permission for audio recording. The interviewees were also informed that this study did not affect any of their assessments. Furthermore, the interviewees acknowledged that if they felt uncomfortable with the study, they could withdraw from participation at any time. The interviews were conducted primarily in Thai, and each session was approximately 40-50 minutes. After the interviews, the audio logs were transcribed and translated into English, and the transcription was sent to each corresponding interviewee for accuracy validation. Eventually, the data were analyzed by qualitative content analysis to construct contextual interpretations, identify patterns, and establish facts (Dörnyei, 2007; Patton, 2002). Top-down coding was utilized to generate a classification of data based on preconceived codes matching research focuses, and bottom-up coding was also applied to create other codes from the resultant data (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). The interview data were repeatedly read and checked throughout the data analysis process to ensure that every emerging theme relevant to the study was extracted. Once the themes were obtained, they were organized and categorized for consistencies and coded into thematic results to present data interrelatedness. More specifically, the data were coded using three steps, including data sorting, interpreting, and theorizing (Lewins & Silver, 2007, pp. 262–267). Towards the end of the analysis, redundant subthemes were merged into a larger theme, while the irrelevant ones were removed. On top of that, efforts were taken to increase the anonymity of the data and prevent any potential identification of the participants. Hence, each excerpt presented in the Findings section utilizes pseudonyms and redacts identifiable names. For instance, T1S1 refers to Teacher 1 at Site 1.

Findings

The interview data obtained from the 18 teachers in the six schools in the Deep South revealed that five primary issues causing teachers' inefficiency in ELT and students' low English language proficiencies were as follows:

Implementation of Broad-Spectrum ELT Policies

As pointed out in the interviews, most of the key informants agreed that the current English language education policy in Thailand was not practical and needed reconceptualization, especially when it is applied to the secular-Islamic education system implemented in private Islamic schools in the three southern border provinces (see Excerpts 1 and 2) where students had been exposed to different linguacultural upbringings from those in other regions of Thailand.

Excerpt 1 (T1S1)

There are ministerial and school policies on English language education, but the school has limitations, so it has not implemented all the ministerial policies. Since our school is a private religious school offering religious courses, we must allocate some class periods for religious education. Hence, we have less time to run secular courses, such as English subjects.

Excerpt 2 (T5S2)

The currently implemented school policy for ELT seems inconsistent and does not address school contexts, emphasizing more on the teaching of Arabic than English, and the school could not manage to run a schedule based on the requirement of the Ministry of Education's curriculum policy, requiring a minimum of five lessons per week. The school could only do three lessons per week because it is necessary to allocate time for religious studies as well, and with this allocation, we do not have enough time for ELT.

As stated above, the policy applied to private Islamic schools presented a significant contextual mismatch. Hence, teachers recommended that the Ministry of Education or the Office of Private Education solve problems through a curricular integration by removing less relevant courses and adding more English classes. Furthermore, desirable learning competencies for foreign language communication, especially English, were also suggested to be determined. Another recommended solution was to use English as a medium of instruction in non-English courses to offer more opportunities to practice the language. Simultaneously, it might be wise for the policy to also provide relevant ELT training for teachers in these schools (see Excerpts 3 and 4).

Excerpt 3 (T10S4)

The government or the Ministry of Education should issue policies that encourage schools to revise their curriculums by integrating English into every subject to promote English language learning. Similarly, contents related to Islamic Studies could also be added to English courses. Doing so would encourage students to see the value of learning English even more because they get to appreciate the religion and the language at the same time. As for the school, it is ready to change and welcome the new teaching style if there is a clear policy from the government side.

Excerpt 4 (T16S6)

Because the school does not have enough English language teachers for teaching, the policy that should be implemented is related to the recruitment of government employees to perform these teaching duties in private Islamic schools. This policy would provide opportunities and

equality to students in terms of access to qualified teachers. Also, teachers should know about teaching integrations to teach religious content using English to better address school contexts.

Insufficient Teaching Integrations with Islamization

On this note, the key informants believed that one of the practical teaching methods that could stimulate learning attention and enhance students' competence is associating in- and off-class teaching activities with learners' identities. To elaborate, they agreed that it is vital for the Islamic ways of life to be integrated with ELT speaking, reading, and presenting activities. Students could have a conversation, read an article, and present ideas on topics that are Islamic related in English (see Excerpt 5 and 6). Furthermore, students could take a field trip to places of interest with Islamic and historical significance in the communities where they live to practice presenting information about these sites in English (see Excerpt 7). However, although the integrations and Islamization were perceived as an appropriate adaptation towards providing 21st-century education, the findings also suggested that most English teachers in the Deep South did not pay adequate attention to the practical side of the integrations.

Excerpt 5 (T7S3)

I believe applying Islamic values in class makes teaching easier. It is like the kids already have prior knowledge, and the only thing we need to do is switch from talking with the familiar Thai language to English. For instance, when you assign topics for them to practice speaking or making presentations, you should propose topics related to the Islamic culture. If you want them to practice reading, you can find the history of Prophet Muhammad in English for them to read, or you can introduce them to important Islamic days such as Hari Raya (Eid al-Fitr) or the importance of the Ramadan month for further discussion.

Excerpt 6 (T12S4)

There are many Islamic books and learning resources in English on the Internet and YouTube. But those realistically consistent with local school contexts yet remain limited. Personally, I think that teachers can use media from other sources, but the main problem is that they are still too attached to textbooks even though they are not integrated with Islam. This problem may be because teachers do not have enough time to prepare materials or possess integration skills. Schools must train teachers, and the government must also support their development.

Excerpt 7 (T14S5)

There are many important historical Islamic sites around the school and the community here, so I think English learning activities can be organized by linking to learners' familiar environments, such as locations where they live. For example, you can take the students to Krue Se Mosque, set up a tour guide club, create videos to introduce the location in English, and present them in class. Active learning provides exciting learning experiences, but teachers here rarely consider doing it.

Inadequate Awareness of the Significance of English

Another critical barrier perceivably diminishing the English learning performance, lowering English language proficiencies, and deteriorating learning motivation was the missing prioritization due to inadequate awareness of the significance of English (see Excerpts 8 to 9).

Excerpt 8 (T1S1)

Most of the students I teach at school do not like learning English because they think English is excessively complicated, and they do not have a subject-specific knowledge capital.

Excerpt 9 (T9S3)

I have talked to many students, especially those living in rural areas. They expressed that English was not necessary because they did not have a chance to use it daily. So, they thought it was not essential or valuable. Since they live in rural areas and had limited access to English language development as they grew up, they were not interested in learning the language. Some schools focus on teaching Arabic and Malay. Therefore, English has become less relevant, and only a few hours of English subjects were allocated and taught as a result.

Based on the said limitation, the teachers suggested a strategy to motivate learners in line with the contexts of private Islamic schools, which is by supplementarily employing native English teachers so that students can familiarize themselves with native English speakers and sense that English is one of the essential languages in everyday life. Another strategy to motivate learning is the use of modern media. Students should be allowed to access such media more conveniently. In addition, more English courses should be added per week, and they should focus on fun factors in communication rather than grammatical correctness (see Excerpts 10 and 11).

Excerpt 10 (T18S6)

There are three core English language subjects a week. They are considered not enough. The subject should be taught every day. Schools should add extra English language courses, but they must be fun to learn and focus on communication. They must not put pressure on the students or make them feel like English is difficult to master.

Excerpt 11 (T6S2)

Teacher diversity should be utilized. International teachers might help. The school has brought international students from universities to school, and they did activities with the students. It appeared the students enjoyed the moments very much, expressed their eagerness to get to know these international students, and demonstrated seeing values in language learning because understanding a language gives them the ability to communicate with international people.

From the interview data, there were several factors influencing students' attitudes towards English language learning. (1) It was students' personal decision to dislike English since they had lower foundation knowledge of English (see Excerpt 8); (2) The students lived in non-English-speaking environments, requiring minimal real-world usage of English as a primary language. In many cases, the students spent most of their lives traveling back and forth between homes and schools, and they did not have many opportunities to go out, learn something new, or live in any other unfamiliar communities (see Excerpt 9); (3) Not much time was allocated for English language lessons per week because the students simultaneously studied secular and Islamic courses. Hence, their exposure to the use of English remained low (see Excerpt 10).

ELT Cultural contents

Based on the logic that English has become a global language and no citizens from a specific nation, such as the USA or the UK, could claim exclusive ownership of the language, most informants believed that currently utilized English language courses, including textbooks, were not effectively designed for them and they were not practical in addressing real-world contexts. Contents and images presented in these materials looked unfamiliar to them, leaving significant learning gaps since the students had difficulty associating them with their backgrounds (see excerpts 12 and 13).

Excerpt 12 (T9S3)

Textbooks are too broad and far learners' environments. Contents are about European, British, and Canadian cultures. Let me use sports as an example, western sports are illustrated, such as skiing and baseball. The students looked confused when I taught them about these sports.

Excerpt 13 (T15S5)

The content in the textbooks does not correspond to the contexts of our learners. Images are full of western tourist attractions and western meals like pizzas, burgers, and steaks. Similarly, the reading content often features British and American cultures, such as Halloween and Christmas. Most of the students did not even know about them. It was difficult for them to imagine, and it was not easy for teachers to teach them either because the students did not know what to say.

From the above data, most ELT textbooks in Thailand seemed biased with content choices as they emphasized that western cultures perceivably belong to native speakers of the British and American English varieties. On the contrary, students' cultures were not included in these textbooks and not substantially mentioned in ELT. To address this problem, some informants (see Excerpts 14 and 15) recommended that the efficiency of deep south ELT could be enhanced by selecting textbooks that offer multicultural content, including learners' and other cultures. Furthermore, it would be wise avoid emphasizing western cultures if teachers would like to enrich English language learning experiences for their students as a positive atmosphere promotes learning motivation and positive attitudes towards learning English.

Excerpt 14 (T7S3)

I would like to say that teaching content should be a mixture of western and local cultures to facilitate our students as they study English. Lessons should contain multicultural content. It would be even more optimal if students' cultures could be incorporated into the learning. If the students could study English through their cultures, I am sure they will get excited as if the content were genuinely about their lives.

Excerpt 15 (T4S2)

We live in a multicultural society here. There are people of various religions and races living together. I think a suitable English language textbook for our students here would be the one presenting through multicultural content. It would be a plus if there is content about students' cultures in it.

Impractical Classroom Arrangement

Appropriate classroom arrangement was a success factor in enhancing English language proficiencies for deep south students. An ideal classroom would be the one that allows students to talk, exchange, and discuss ideas. In reality, however, it was found that the students were too shy to raise and share opinions with their classmates or teachers. The interviews revealed a noteworthy answer, reflecting that many teachers did not attempt to arrange their classrooms. In fact, seats were reportedly left unadjusted, meaning that they were sorted into the usual row patterns front to back. However, this seating strategy did not facilitate discussion- and activity-based learning (see Excerpts 14 and 15).

Excerpt 16 (T14S5)

I tried to figure out how to get my students to actively engage in in-class discussions and activities. Before every activity, we usually brainstormed for ideas, but the usual seating did not help with the discussion because the students could only turn to a particular direction when they sit in rows. So, it was not easy to organize activities in a classroom with that kind of seating arrangement.

Excerpt 17 (T1S1)

In fact, there were several causes. The one that stood out was classroom management, especially the seating arrangements that did not allow the students to turn to one another to discuss ideas. The conventional seating forced them only to face their teachers in front of the classroom.

To motivate students, enhance their participation, and encourage them to exchange ideas with the class, many teachers introduced new classroom seating patterns. They suggested that seats and tables could be set in a pattern for students to face each other, such as circular and U-shaped designs. The seating could also change from period to period based on learning activities. The findings discovered that after the teachers rearranged their seats and tables, students engaged more in discussion and significantly shared more ideas with their classmates (see Excerpts 18-19).

Excerpt 18 (T11S4)

To tone the atmosphere for discussion and give students opportunities to share more ideas and experiences, I suddenly decided to rearrange seats and tables in my classroom into all kinds of shapes from the U shape on one day to the O shape on the following day. The students got to sit in large and small groups, depending on the activities that we did.

Excerpt 19 (T13S5)

After doing it for a while, I asked the students for feedback. They told me that they liked it when I organize the classroom like this. It was not boring, and it added colors to the learning. They did not feel uncomfortable having to sit like this. More importantly, some said they wanted every classroom to be like this one because they do not want to feel bad for being seen as a slacker sitting towards the back of the room.

Discussion

The findings provided teachers' reflections confirming that there were five primary factors or causes that shared significant influences on ELT efficiency levels in private Islamic schools in the Deep South of Thailand. To begin with, most of the key informants agreed that they had experienced broad-spectrum and top-down ELT policies (Ahuja, 2011; Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016). The central administration designed most of the policies and courses, possibly based on a limited understanding of local contexts. Hence, the incorporation of local resources for learning was neglected. However, the Deep South of Thailand is a unique region as it is home to the Muslim majority. Muslim students strictly follow the Islamic way of life, which is different from most learners in Thailand. Therefore, ELT follows contextual suitability and practicality, considering the uniqueness that deep south students share. It is crucial for local practitioners to have more opportunities to design curriculum and construct guidelines for instructional management following students' cultural identities. This contextual awareness could add pride to the learning and help students learn through simplified or tailored content based on existing real-world knowledge. To elaborate, Islamic contents and values that reflect students' identities should be integrated into private Islamic schools' ELT in the Deep South. Furthermore, textbooks for Thai Muslim students must be carefully selected to diversify contents since it is no longer necessary to study English by attaching to a specific culture or an ethnic group. More importantly, ELT should introduce more links to Islamic values and cultures and fewer links to western cultures because western knowledge is a far-flung concept beyond most students' imagination (Prabjandee, 2020; Rajprasit & Marlina, 2019). With this transformation, students are given opportunities to compare western cultures with theirs via tailored textbooks and explore the current English diversity. Ideal ELT textbooks for deep south Muslim students are those customized to contain content on their unique cultural identities and the Islamic way of life. Nevertheless, the current practices of integrating Islam with ELT had not been a popular choice in these private Islamic schools, and those who did still faced several limitations, including the teaching required to adhere to national policies, teachers lacking the practical knowledge to pull off an effective integration, and Thai educational stakeholders preferring to introduce students to western cultures while marginalizing their very cultures (Tarrayo, Ulla, & Lekwilai, 2020).

Another significant issue that was addressed by the key informants was the inequality of access to learning resources between students in regular and special classes. Many schools had policies to offer students opportunities to study in special classes with privileged access to more resources than those in regular classes. This act of separating students into categories seemed discriminatory and could directly impact academic achievement (Goudeau & Croizet, 2017). Those who lack access to learning opportunities might not perform well in education eventually. Rather, the goal of education could be to equally provide skill development for every student to grow up as a quality global citizen with the required competencies to face the rapidly changing world. Hence, educational inequality is another problem that requires the attention of school administrators and officers in relevant agencies, especially in private Islamic schools in the Deep South where students have been living with prolonged political unrest and frequent eruptions of violent incidents. Therefore, to prevent and reduce possible educational disparities, the government and concerned third parties involved in educational development should investigate strategies for facilitating greater access to high quality teaching and learning for all students. At the same time, schools must strive ensure equal treatment is given to each student.

Moreover, the findings also indicated that levels of awareness of the significance of English were significantly linked to the effectiveness of ELT. This notion suggested that if students recognize the importance of the language, they might also understand the consequence of not knowing it. In other words, how much they value English can be measured through positive changes in their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors towards learning the language (Baker, 2015; Bartram, 2010; Garrett, 2010). Hence, educational stakeholders, especially teachers, should actively foster this positive awareness for their students. They should seek to tone their classroom atmospheres to promote effective and meaningful English language learning, offer students some opportunities to take part in designing their English learning activities, introduce off-class learning experiences, and constantly create situations for them to practice English by involving as many interlocutors from diverse linguacultural backgrounds as possible.

The findings also indicated that there is another aspect of ELT that demands thoughtful consideration. Evidently, most English language teachers remained in conventional classroom designs and arrangements where students had to sit in rows and turn their backs to their peers. This type of classroom arrangement is often considered to be antiquated in the 21st century and could even lead to discriminatory practices as some front-row students could be viewed as intelligent, whereas back-row students could be perceived as slow learners. Today's learning activities require students to actively engage in discussion, collaboration, and presentation of ideas with free space for imagination to run wild (Harvey & Kenyon, 2013). Many classroom arrangements are proven to support students throughout their learning challenges and help ease depressive feelings for some who were once viewed negatively as back-row students because back rows could be eliminated in these new classrooms, for instance, arranged as an open space, in a U shape, with a seat switching agreement, with group seating, or with an ultra-large writing board added. Unfortunately, many schools face efficiency barriers such as limited budgets, inflexible classroom spaces, and even the lack of readiness of teachers.

Conclusion

English serves as a gateway to broader educational and professional opportunities. The findings confirmed that ELT in the 21st century has changed towards acknowledging local contexts more and European cultures less. Implementing contextualized textbooks with more local content and integrating information and communications technology (ICT) are not the only options teachers should resort to for their ELT. They are suggested to expose their students to off-class experiences and surround them with locally available English language learning experiences and resources. Locally accessible learning tools can be priceless, ideal, authentic, and effective learning materials utilizable if schools lack access to relevant resources. Another highly recommended option is online media. Modern technology grants equal English language learning opportunities to students regardless of their residential areas. Private Islamic schools in the Deep South are in a unique position because they are surrounded by Malay Muslims born and bred in a Malaysian culture. Local lifestyles are substantially different from those of other regions in the country. Since they live in unique geography along the coasts of the Andaman Sea and the Pacific Ocean, people have unique occupations and ways of life. Teachers should take advantage of this knowledge and take their classrooms to a new level by exposing their students to real-world experiences. The diverse cultural backgrounds of the students can be factored in by contextualizing and Islamizing ELT based on diverse ways of life and faith. By adding these values to ELT, students might be convinced to begin developing the language because it would make more sense for them to study English if it is about their familiar cultures. The government issue policies to support the emphasis of learning through local content and avoid pressuring locals to implement curriculum, books, and content introduced by the central

administration. Additionally, financial support should be provided to increase resource availability and provide professional training for teachers based on local contexts.

The study presented noteworthy reflections of English teachers in private Islamic schools that were thought-provoking and enlightening. The same reflections can inform school leaders when formulating their English language development policies and practical guidelines for private Islamic schools. Furthermore, the insights might be especially beneficial to school administrators when designing training activities for their teachers and support staff based on school contexts. To clarify, the research findings can serve as a guideline when designing school ELT policies and programs to address learning needs and contexts using learners' local cultural contents. Furthermore, teachers could also review these findings as they develop their teaching strategies and collaborate with other teachers to create English teaching materials to increase learning excitement and effectiveness.

In other words, teachers can design ELT activities and materials to include more diverse elements, such as content related to learner identities. By doing so, learners have more opportunities to practice English through imaginable, familiar, or tangible components around them. Hence, school administrators and teachers in Thailand are suggested to consider providing their students with ELT activities that involve existing knowledge and familiar local cultures when making policies and designing ELT curriculums (Galloway & Rose, 2018; Jindapitak, Teo, & Savski, 2022; Prabjandee & Fang, 2022). Future studies are suggested to expand this exploration to a quantitative dimension to obtain data on the needs and practices of English teachers in private Islamic schools that can substantially represent the teacher population. In addition, further studies could focus on skill development while integrating Islamic studies and other disciplines into English language courses and the production of English textbooks that address school contexts.

Note that this study had some limitations in its data collection since it was conducted during the outbreak of COVID-19. Consequently, some interview sessions were canceled, postponed, and rescheduled because schools were ordered to shut down, and participants had contracted COVID-19. Some target schools were small and did not have enough teachers. As a result, they were forced to partially use those without ELT qualifications.

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Mobile Learning for Malay Language among Foreign Workers: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the learning process and language acquisition of Communicative Malay Language (CML) among foreign workers in Malaysia. A total of 10 foreign workers who were randomly selected in Kuala Lumpur and volunteered to participate were interviewed individually. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated and interpreted to enable the researcher to conduct content analysis. The analysis revealed that most of the respondents were not adequately supplied with general knowledge about the country, and especially the language, when they arrived in Malaysia for the first time. Although only half of them specifically reported the utilization of mobile applications in learning CML, all of the respondents were aware of mobile applications in general and agreed that this would be a good instrument to help them learn the language, especially the listening aspect.

Keywords: adult learning, andragogy, Malay as foreign language, mobile assisted language learning, self-directed learning

The population of foreign workers in Malaysia is estimated to increase to approximately 1.9 million by 2022 (Ng, 2018). This is not a surprising situation, since Malaysia is progressing well towards a better infrastructure and economic status, which requires the recruitment of more foreign workers (Karim, Mohamad Diah, Mustari, Sarker, & Islam, 2015). However, many foreign workers lack appropriate preparation with general knowledge about the new country and language prior to arriving to start work in the country (Al Gammal, 2020). According to Malaysia's Ministry of Human Resources, one of the most prominent aspects required from these workers is to be equipped with the ability to communicate with the locals (International Labour Organisation, 2015). Generally, one of the most crucial elements in communication is the comprehension of language (Sirbu, 2015).

The context of this study is that language is an important aspect that helps foreign workers to convey and express their thoughts and needs and to comprehend information, thus producing more efficient and effective communication. Failing to master this aspect will cause miscommunication with the local residents as well as constraints on the efficiency of one's business organization. Nonetheless, for these foreign workers, learning without any proper settings might have been the result of a hurried relocation given that they are not offered any formal comprehensive induction before coming to Malaysia, and they possess irregular and long working hours (Putul & Mia, 2020). Thus, acquiring the language goes beyond a standard pedagogy that is taught in schools. The workers under consideration are all adults, whose learning style differs from that of children.

Furthermore, there is still a lack of empirical evidence to understand the process of Malay language acquisition among foreign workers in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aims to understand the learning process of Communicative Malay Language (CML) among foreign workers in Malaysia as well as to explore the emergence of a mobile-assisted language learning application among foreign workers.

Language Proficiency Skills

According to Sadiku (2015), there are four language skills that build language proficiency, namely reading, speaking, listening and writing. These skills can be categorized into two main groups of proficiencies: oral proficiency and written proficiency. Oral proficiency involves high interactivity and spontaneous feedback between people, whereas written proficiency is more recursive, thus allowing a person to review and amend utterances. Generally all of the abovementioned language skills are important to achieve high quality proficiency. Söderqvist (2018), on the other hand, argued that there are two main types of proficiency, which are production and reception. Productive proficiency encompasses speaking and writing skills, while receptive proficiency encompasses reading and listening skills. For the scope of this study, it is important to note that it is impossible for a person to function well by merely depending on a single language proficiency skill. The language learner must combine at least two types of proficiency skills in order to interact with the immediate surroundings, whether it is a verbal or a non-verbal interaction. Based on the explanations given by Sadiku and Söderqvist, the main goal of this study is to determine which of the language proficiency skills are most needed among foreign workers in Malaysia in order for them to function well as part of the working community.

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

According to Sagar (2013), there are nearly six billion subscriptions to mobile phone services worldwide, and the rate of mobile devices accessing the Internet is three times higher than that of computers. Sagar added that the advancement of mobile devices today has offered new ways of learning that are well adapted to learning languages due to their flexibility and cost-effectiveness. This phenomenon is relevant to the large-scale development of mobile applications for adults' foreign language learning, as this method of learning allows this category of the working generation to develop a skill that can complement their formal education, thus improving their lives (Sagar, 2013). Furthermore, Deng and Shao (2011), who also advocate the employment of technology in learning, have suggested that mobile applications are among the most effective tools for self-directed language learning. This is because smartphones have gradually become a necessity for people to own, regardless of their age and demographic background (Deng & Shao, 2011). To date, there are numbers of studies that have proved the effectiveness of MALL globally (Zhang, & Zou, 2021).

On the other hand, a systematic review that was conducted by Hawamdeh and Soykan (2021) revealed that most studies pertaining to the effectiveness of mobile language learning were conducted in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The analysis also showed that English is the most examined foreign language among mobile learners. Hawamdeh and Soykan's analysis concluded that the trend of mobile learning for the past five years has surged significantly. Their analysis also indicated that there are increasing numbers of empirical findings to prove that mobile phones are more effective than other methods of learning, especially for learning English. Nonetheless, it is still an arguable statement, since most of the research involved higher education students from developing countries. If adults and/or foreign workers were being included, the result may be varied. In order to compare English and Malay Language, it is significant that there are obviously numerous mobile resources that could be found for English since English is the current lingua franca of the world (Rao, 2019).

Therefore, the effectiveness of mobile learning as an all-inclusive process is still yet to be established. In the scope of this study, there are two main concerns that need to be addressed. The first concern involves the adoption of mobile technology among foreign workers, particularly in Malaysia. According to Al Masud, Hamzah, and Ahmad (2020), most foreign workers in Malaysia are low-educated and low-skilled. This may impact the way they utilize mobile technology in their daily lives. Although technology is meant to ease the complexity of certain tasks, for lower-educated people, it seems to be the other way around. This situation is better known as the digital divide. In general, the digital divide is regarded as social inequality in which learners of lower socioeconomic status exhibit lower levels of internet literacy which is impacted by the lack of device ownership and internet-based skills (Puspitasari & Ishii, 2016). The second issue to address is the acceptance of mobile learning among adults.

Theory of Andragogy (Knowles, 1978) and Self-Directed Learning

The acquisition of foreign language proficiency is viewed differently among adults. This is because adults learn differently from children (Brockett & Hiemstra, 2018). Citing Knowles (1978), Brockett and Hiemstra mentioned that adults tend to have self-directed learning styles. These learning styles refer to adults' predominant characteristics in deciding and diagnosing their learning needs as well as formulating and utilizing resources in order to achieve their learning goals (Brockett & Hiemstra, 2018). This means that what may seem important to learn for some people may not be important for others. This would result in different learning

outcomes among adult learners. In the scope of this study, some foreign language learners may possess good oral proficiency rather than written proficiency and vice versa. Brockett and Hiemstra added that adults are autonomous in finding any available materials that would assist in their personal learning, including signing up for courses, buying extra books or even employing technological assistance. According to Wehmeyer, Shogren, and Thompson (2018), adult education in general emphasizes self-directed or self-regulated learning. This means that adults hold greater autonomy, which allows them to design their learning process to suit their professional needs (Wehmeyer, Shogren, & Thompson, 2018). This takes into account the individual's ability, interests, preferences and opportunities that can be accessed in the effort to achieve their learning goal. Combining the commentaries and description of the term "self-directed learning" from both Brockett and Hiemstra as well as Wehmeyer, Shogren, and Thompson, this study investigates the way foreign workers learn CML to suit the needs of their professions.

However, as mentioned in the previous section, adults' acceptance to MALL may differ from an individual to another. In other words, they have full authority to reject or accept mobile learning. This decision is made based on their cognitive maturity level. Therefore for this study, it is imperative to know that stages of adulthood affect the acceptance of mobile language learning. This is because a self-directed learning style is closely related to adults' cognitive maturity, and this would determine their perceptions on the best method of learning for themselves. In Malaysia, the legal age range for foreign workers is between 18 years to 45 years old (The Malaysian Employer Federation, 2014). This age range covers from young to middle aged adulthood. For this range of adults, the acceptance of mobile learning occurs only if the platform is able to support their communication needs and would enable them to fulfil personal achievement without facing complicated features that would slow the learning process and eventually demotivated them (Hashim, Tan, & Rashid, 2015). Thus, for the context of this current study, foreign workers' maturity might also have affected the way they employ mobile learning, apart from having lower socioeconomic status.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain a deeper understanding of adults' learning process in acquiring CML, including their perceptions towards the utilization of mobile applications. It is important to understand how these learners view and experience the self-directed language acquisition process, especially given that the emergence of mobile applications would affect the way they learn. This preliminary study involves a total of ten respondents who are foreign workers from various sectors in Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, based on the literature discussed above, this study is intended to explore the following research questions:

- 1) Which language skills are most needed among foreign workers in acquiring CML?
- 2) How do foreign workers learn and acquire CML?
- 3) What are the potential utilizations of mobile applications in assisting CML learning among foreign workers?

In order to answer all the aforementioned research questions, a set of interview questions was prepared. The questions were validated by two academic qualitative researchers. Since this is a preliminary study, no pilot studies was conducted prior to the interview.

The population involved in this study are foreign workers based in the main city, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. They worked in various blue collar sectors. A simple random method has been utilized for this study. Note that for the interviews, Indonesian workers were excluded from the sample for this study due to the same basis of Malay language. All the potential respondents were approached individually, they were informed about the purpose of the research as well as the confidentiality of their information. Initially, there were more than 20 foreign workers who were personally approached by the first author of this research. Nonetheless, only 10 workers agreed to participate. The set of the interview questions were prepared in both Malay Language and English. However, since most of the workers had low proficiency in reading for both languages, the researchers decided to make the tone of the interviews less formal by conducting the interviews casually in which all the questions were asked in a conversational way using mixed languages between English and Malay Language. During each interview session, most of the respondents were accompanied by their colleagues as they were not comfortable to have a direct conversation with the researcher in private. The researcher agreed and all the interviews were completed at their workplaces during break time or after working hours. The average time for each interview was around 20 to 30 minutes. In hindsight, their colleagues were mostly senior workers and would help to interpret and break down any situation that the respondents were trying to convey during the interviews.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed for content analysis. Content analysis is considered as one of the most important qualitative analysis techniques in the social sciences (Krippendorff, 2018). According to Krippendorff (2018), content analysis is used to analyse data within a specific context of meaning imposed by a person. These meanings are typically inferred by text, which is conventionally collected from verbal discourse or written documents. Krippendorff added that this form of analysis allows the researcher to construct inferences of a phenomenon based on the rich repertoire of the data collection through coding. The frequency of these references would then indicate the contextual meaning and interpretation. For the scope of this study, this type of analysis technique is employed as the means to interpret interview data using a dialectic process in which interview data was first understood, then explained and finally comprehended. The process of analysis and interpretation started by transcribing the verbal face-to-face interview data. The transcriptions were then read several times before proceeding with the coding process. This repetitive reading was conducted in order to gain a preliminary understanding of the whole phenomenon and its context. The statements given by the respondents were then identified and classified into meaningful items that were coded into themes (Severinsson, 2003). The themes were interpreted within the context of this study. The final phase involved interpretation of the transcribed text as a whole and re-contextualizing it into a new, clearer and more concrete understanding.

Findings and Interpretation

The main finding of this study focuses on the CML learning process among foreign workers who are self-directed adult learners based on the fact that they possess a degree of maturity to access their own personal needs for learning and its development. This study also explores the potential of mobile-assisted language learning applications among foreign workers. Based on the qualitative content analysis conducted, the findings are distributed into six main themes: The need to learn CML; The ability to master all four language proficiencies; Awareness of CML courses available; Self-directed learning style; Awareness of mobile applications; Awareness and use of mobile applications in learning CML.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

| Respondent | Nationality | Age Range | Career Background | Duration of Staying |
|---------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Respondent 1 | Nepalese | 25-34 | Resident Guard | Less than a year |
| Respondent 2 | Bangladeshi | 25-34 | Shop Assistant | More than 3 years |
| Respondent 3 | Bangladeshi | 35-44 | Shop Manager | More than a year |
| Respondent 4 | Bangladeshi | 25-34 | Shop Assistant | More than a year |
| Respondent 5 | Bangladeshi | 35-44 | Car Wash Worker | More than 3 years |
| Respondent 6 | Nepalese | 25-34 | Resident Guard | More than a year |
| Respondent 7 | Bangladeshi | 35-44 | Construction Worker | More than 3 years |
| Respondent 8 | Nepalese | 25-34 | Resident Guard | More than 3 years |
| Respondent 9 | Nepalese | 25-34 | Resident Guard | More than 5 years |
| Respondent 10 | Nepalese | 35-44 | Resident Guard | More than a year |

Based on the demographic profile in Table 1, it is found that five respondents are from Bangladesh (N=5), with the national native tongue of Bengali, while the other five are from Nepal (N=5), with the national native tongue of Nepali. It is also found that all the Nepalese respondents involved in this study are working as residential guards. The Bangladeshis, on the other hand, are working in various blue-collar sectors, such as construction workers, shop assistants and car-wash workers. The table also shows that at the time of the interviews, only one respondent had been in Malaysia for less than a year.

Theme I: The Need to Learn Communicative Malay Language

Table 2
Respondents' Previous Working Experience before Migrating to Malaysia

| Respondent | Previous Countries | Language Spoken Previously |
|---------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Respondent 1 | - | English |
| Respondent 2 | - | English |
| Respondent 3 | Saudi Arabia | English, Arabic |
| Respondent 4 | - | - |
| Respondent 5 | Saudi Arabia, Dubai | Urdu, Arabic |
| Respondent 6 | - | English |
| Respondent 7 | - | - |
| Respondent 8 | India | English, Urdu |
| Respondent 9 | Saudi Arabia | English, Arabic |
| Respondent 10 | India | English, Hindi |

Table 2 shows the other countries where the respondents had lived and the languages they spoke other than their native tongue. When they were asked to describe their previous working experiences, respondents 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10 reported that they had worked in other countries in the past, while the remainder had migrated for the first time to work in Malaysia. Respondents 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10 also stated that they were able to speak the native languages of the countries they had previously migrated to at the communicative level. Respondents 4 and 7, who had never migrated to any other countries before coming to Malaysia, reported that they were not able to speak in English – only Malay. The respondents were then asked about their perceptions of CML. All of the respondents mentioned that Malay was easy to learn and some of them suggested that it was much easier compared to other languages, including their own native languages:

Malay language is so easy...because Malay grammar is easier compared to Bangladeshi and Arabic grammar.... (Respondent 3, Extract 1)

Malay is easier than Bangladeshi...here, I only learn from listening repetitively to what other people are saying and I can catch them (words) already. (Respondent 7, Extract 1)

All of the respondents agreed that it is important for them to be able to speak Malay at the basic level. However, all of them perceived that the need to learn CML is more for the sake of survival rather than for mixing with the locals. Most of the respondents reported that they needed to learn CML solely for work. In other words, they can speak and comprehend the language only in the context and the perimeter of their workplace and they are not able to converse if it is not work-related:

...I can speak and understand if it's in this shop... such as "rice", "fish", "chicken" and "vegetables" (Respondent 4, Extract 1)

They say things like "wash", "vacuum this car", "how much for this?"... I can understand...but when I go outside, I only speak Malay to buy things, such as asking the price. I always go to Klang, but there I speak Urdu because there are a lot of Malaysian Indians and they speak Urdu... not so much Malay. (Respondent 5, Extract 1)

Theme II: The Acquisition of All Four Language Skills

Table 3

Respondents' Perception of Language Proficiency Skills

| Respondent | Speaking | Reading | Writing | Listening |
|--------------|----------|---------|---------|-----------|
| Respondent 1 | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Respondent 2 | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| Respondent 3 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Respondent 4 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Respondent 5 | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| Respondent 6 | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Respondent 7 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |

| | | | | |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Respondent 8 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Respondent 9 | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Respondent 10 | Yes | No | No | Yes |

Table 3 shows that all of the respondents are able to speak and listen well. As explained in the previous section, these two skills are prominently correlated to oral communication skills (Brockett & Hiemstra, 2018). The interview data also discovered that respondents 3 and 8 are able to read and pronounce Malay words according to the spelling given, although they are not able to understand the meanings of all the words. This is because Malay is a phonetically-based language. Table 3 also reveals that respondent 3 is the only respondent who has mastered all the basic language skills. From the hermeneutic point of view, his ability to master all four skills is closely related to the nature of his job as a shop manager. The respondent reported that he had to deal with local suppliers and needed to read and write invoices and other memos. He admitted that he still had a hard time understanding the conjugated versions of words, but he is nonetheless able to capture the meaning of the text as a whole.

Table 4

Respondents' Self-rankings of the Importance of Language Skills

| Respondent | The Importance of Language Skills (from the most important to the least important) |
|---------------|---|
| Respondent 1 | Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing |
| Respondent 2 | Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing |
| Respondent 3 | Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing |
| Respondent 4 | Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing |
| Respondent 5 | Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing |
| Respondent 6 | Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing |
| Respondent 7 | Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing |
| Respondent 8 | Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing |
| Respondent 9 | Listening, Speaking, Writing, Reading |
| Respondent 10 | Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing |

All of the respondents were asked to rank their perceptions of language skills from the most important to the least important. Table 4 shows that all of the respondents focused on the importance of oral communication skills, namely speaking and listening. The table also shows that most of the respondents (N=7) perceived that listening is the most essential skill in communication. The table also clearly shows that these foreign workers do not put much concern on writing (N=9). This could be due to their working contexts, which typically do not require much writing.

Theme III: Awareness of the CML Courses Available

The interview data revealed that all of the respondents involved in this study reported that they were not aware of any CML courses available in the city where they worked. Nonetheless, with

the exception of respondent 10, all of the Nepalese respondents working as residential guards mentioned that they were given inductions and training before starting their jobs, and that one of the contents of these inductions was CML. However, respondent 8 reported that the training only taught them basic words and how to use them in simple sentences. They were not even given any books. His response is also parallel with respondent 9, who works for a different security company:

They did not give us any books... We were not aware about any Malay language books available and where to buy them... we were still new to Malaysia at that time... . (Respondent 8, Extract 1)

Yes, we went for training and learned a bit about the language, but no books or anything... in the end, I had to learn by myself. (Respondent 9, Extract 1)

Theme IV: Self-Directed Learning Style

Overall, the interpretation of the interview texts revealed that all of the respondents rely on daily communication with the locals to improve their language acquisition, which only focuses on oral language skills, namely speaking and listening. As reported in the previous section, none of the respondents were aware of any CML courses available in Malaysia. When they were asked if they would hypothetically be interested in signing up to any formal settings to learn CML, surprisingly only respondent 3 was interested. The data from the interview conducted also shows that respondent 3 is a proactive learner, as he has bought his own learning books. Interestingly, respondent 3 also added that it is better to learn Malay from native speakers. Nevertheless, the respondent mentioned that he does not have any local friends, and that this hinders his personal learning process, as he has to rely on his other Bangladeshi friends to learn the language.

The remaining respondents, on the other hand, prefer to learn CML by themselves:

I want to learn by myself...because I have a job and I have no time to go to any classes.... (Respondent 2, Extract 1)

...because I don't live here, I just want to work here, so language class is not important.... (Respondent 4, Extract 2)

...because I need to save money, plus I don't have time, because I'm working until night. (Respondent 5, Extract 2)

The respondents were then asked about their method of learning and acquiring the language by themselves. They were first asked if they used any conventional material such as books to learn Malay. However, only respondents 3 and 4 reported that they used books. Their responses correspond to their reading ability, as mentioned in Theme II.

Most of the respondents mentioned that they learned with the help of their friends and colleagues:

...I have local and Bangladeshi friends and other foreign friends like Indonesians to teach me Malay.... (Respondent 4, Extract 3)

I'm learning Malay with friends who have already been here before I came.
(Respondent 5, Extract 3)

...I learn from friends, from locals and Indonesian workers. I also learn from listening repetitively to other people's sentences.... (Respondent 7, Extract 2)

Furthermore, the respondents also reported that they acquired vocabulary through repeated listening to words spoken among the locals. The interpreted data also indicate that some respondents have utilized technology in assisting their personal learning:

I do watch a few Malay YouTube channels.... (Respondent 4, Extract 4)

At this car wash, there is a TV and it only shows Malay programs, so I usually watch when there is no car... I don't understand what they are saying, but the pictures (visual) help me to understand. (Respondent 5, Extract 4)

I don't use books to learn, but I learn from TV shows.... (Respondent 7, Extract 3)

The interview texts were further perused to determine whether other respondents also used television or radio shows as the medium for their self-directed learning. Notwithstanding the use of television or radio shows by respondents 4, 5, and 7, the remaining respondents are rather negative:

I don't do that... I have my local friends who can teach me... they are good people.
(Respondent 1, Extract 1)

I can read books, but I simply have no time to learn Malay from TV or any media because I don't have all that at this shop.... (Respondent 3, Extract 1)

I don't have any interest in watching Malay channels.... (Respondent 6, Extract 1)

I work 18 hours a day with over-time: I don't have time to watch TV and learn properly.... (Respondent 10, Extract 1)

Lastly, as stated in Table 2, most of the respondents (except for respondents 4 and 7) possessed second or other foreign languages apart from their own native languages and CML. Respondents 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10 specifically informed the interviewer that they had previously worked in other countries such as Saudi Arabia, Dubai, and India before coming to Malaysia. During the interview sessions, all of these respondents reported that they had not signed up for any language classes to learn languages such as Arabic, Hindi and Urdu. In the same way that they had learned Malay, the respondents also acquired the basics of these languages through friends and colleagues as well as listening to the locals speaking. As for English, the respondents explained that it was a subject taught in school, but some also claimed that they had not completed school due to financial constraints, thus resulting in poor English.

Theme V: Awareness of Mobile Applications

This theme explains respondents' awareness and utilization of mobile applications in their daily lives. The findings gained from all the interview sessions provide a new understanding of how some of these foreign workers incorporated technology into their daily lives. This part of the

interview started with a screening question to determine the type of phone that the respondents were currently using. All of the respondents proved that they owned smartphones by showing their phones during the interview sessions. However, respondent 4 mentioned that he had only started using a mobile phone since moving to Malaysia. He also mentioned that he did not own any phones, including old-style keypad phones, when he was in Bangladesh. Similarly, respondent 7 was also first introduced to smartphone use after arriving in Malaysia. Both of these respondents were asked to clarify why this was the case, and both reported that they had faced financial constraints back in Bangladesh. Furthermore, all of the respondents reported that they were aware of mobile applications and had downloaded several applications through Android Playstore, except for respondent 5, who had never downloaded anything and only used the built-in applications on his mobile smartphone.

Theme VI: Awareness and Use of Mobile Applications in Learning CML

This theme is the most crucial part of the study, as it revolves around the utilization of mobile applications in assisting CML self-directed learning among foreign workers. The interview sessions revealed the emergence of the mobile-assisted language learning phenomenon. The interview data revealed that five respondents had already downloaded Malay language learning applications, while the other five respondents were asked to clarify why they had not done so:

I know what a mobile application is... but I didn't know such applications (to learn CML) exist (Respondent 1, Extract 2)

I came here four years ago: I don't think this kind of application was available at that time.... (Respondent 2, Extract 2)

I didn't know there were (CML) applications... I have never used or downloaded any Malay language learning applications... I think it's too hard for me and I never want to try...." (Respondent 3, Extract 2)

I think we have, but I'm not interested. (Respondent 9, Extract 2)

Yes I know, but I never try it.... (Respondent 10, Extract 3)

A list of CML learning mobile applications available on the Play store was shown to the respondents who reported that they were not aware of these mobile applications. Respondent 3 immediately downloaded one of the applications and tried it during the interview session. He then mentioned that the use of mobile applications is a good idea to help in learning CML during the hectic working day. Furthermore, all of the respondents agreed that the use of mobile applications is a good and relevant idea to be implemented as learning tools for those who do not go to any formal classes.

As for the scope of mobile applications' feasibility, respondent 9 indicated that a CML mobile application would help in strengthening his listening comprehension. His opinion is in line with respondents 6, 8 and 10, who all stressed that the use of mobile applications would help them to practice oral communication, especially on the listening aspect.

Discussion and Recommendation

Theme I: The Need to Learn Communicative Malay Language

Based on the findings, it can be inferred that most participants agreed that Malay Language was fairly easy to be used at the communicative level (Basir, 2018; Mohd Ali, Redzuan, Abu Samah, & Mohd Rashid, 2001) and the need to learn the language in a formal setting such as going to any available CML courses may not be their priority. In addition, respondents perceived that they only needed to learn more segmented phrases since they only utilize the language within a transactional scope. This sparks the idea to provide a sort of on-the-go lesson which could introduce them to daily phrases in Malay Language. Therefore, government entities, especially those who are closely related to foreign workers' recruitment, are highly-encouraged to produce phrase bank materials which could be given to the foreign workers on the first week of their arrival in Malaysia. This also would boost the positive image of Malaysia as a host country in providing better social preparation to foreign workers before starting to work among the locals.

Theme II: The Acquisition of All Four Language Skills

The interviews revealed that listening is the most essential skill in communication among participants, followed by speaking skills. This is parallel to Polat and Erişti (2019) who stated that listening skill is a central skill which affects language acquisition the most. Although the findings is too small to be generalized to the whole population of foreign workers in Malaysia, it is still noteworthy to say that this type of communication skills could be the contributing factor to much better understanding between the workers and the locals in Malaysia since they possess different cultural beliefs and world views. However, as mentioned previously, the participants reported that their main idea to learn the language was not to mix around with the locals. This could be due to their intimidation towards the locals. This intimidation may be caused by two reasons. Firstly, it is known that they are intimidated and uncomfortable to be around the locals due to long history of discrimination, exploitation and harassment by irresponsible authorities and employers (Putul & Mia, 2020). Another reason of intimidation could be due to language anxiety. According to Polat and Erişti, language anxiety can be referred as a feeling of tension, fear, uneasiness, apprehension or restlessness that is caused by the action that is required by a communicator before and during listening activity. In order to overcome these learning blocks, a simulated and interactive drillings of small conversations could be executed (Polat & Erişti, 2019). This technique of learning could function as a cognitive cushion to prepare them to the real-world experience. Nonetheless, in order to do so, a strong collaboration between educators and instructional technology developers is needed.

Theme III: Awareness of the CML Courses Available

Overall, 9 out of 10 respondents reported the lack of information on any CML courses available in the main city, and even if the foreign workers who worked as residential guards were given induction, they reported that the content of CML a lesson was barely helpful to them. This is an alarming situation especially to policy makers in Malaysia who had emphasized the compulsory need of having basic knowledge of the language in the country. As imposed by the Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia, foreign workers are supposed to be equipped with the basic knowledge, yet little effort are made to expose the newcomers to the available courses which could assist them much earlier as well as to develop positive perception on local employers. Therefore, it is recommended that policy makers should include CML courses

being offered prior to their arrival. This type of course may be arranged through certain agreements between participating countries which send their citizens to work in Malaysia. Though it may sound easy to be executed, the cooperation of all parties especially from the employers is crucial. This is said based on the different level of privilege received by the foreign workers from their employer.

In Malaysia, there is a disparity between the terms “expatriates” and “foreign workers”. This disparity affects the level of given privilege to the foreigners. Definition-wise, “expatriates” is generally referred to non-nationals who are sent to host country by their organizations or companies which was based in either their home country or others, to accomplish a given task at the host country within a stipulated time of typically more than six months to five years in a term (MycNulty & Brewster, 2017). As for the foreign workers, they are known to be non-nationals who are engaged in remunerated activity in a country where they are recruited (The Employment Act, 1955). Based on the segregated definitions, it can be inferred that expatriates are mostly professionals who usually experienced a much better living environment. In the context of language learning, unlike foreign workers, expatriates in Malaysia are not obliged to acquire basic Malay Language since most of them are able to speak in English and English happens to be Malaysia’s second language. Nonetheless, that does not mean they are not entitled to any Malay Language lessons. In fact, they have better financial and time privilege to learn Malay Language in a proper and formal setting as compared to the foreign workers. However, to date, there is still inadequate empirical evidence on how the expatriates acquire Malay Language as compared to the foreign workers, given that most of them come from developed first-world countries and are able to afford formal CML courses as well as to have more organized time. Therefore, it is highly recommended that additional future studies be conducted in order to gain a better understanding and comparison between these two categories of CML learners in Malaysia.

Theme IV: Self-Directed Learning Style

The findings highlighted the fact that a self-directed learning style is obviously exhibited by the respondents since most of them acquired CML through various independent methods. The findings also intersect with another research study which was conducted by Khan, Hashim, and Yousuf, (2021). According to Khan, Hashim, and Yousuf, most of the foreign workers in Malaysia are not given any language training and more than 90% of the workers took at least three to six months to acquire basic Malay Language by the help of their colleagues or family members. The intersection of these findings proved that foreign workers in Malaysia are still able to learn Malay Language at their own pace and time availability despite having to work tirelessly. Learning also happened based on their own personal motivation which is not to fully utilize the language within social context. The fact that they believe learning the language is a crucial element to their survival at work, shows that there is a need to develop a flexible CML learning platform that would cater to this niche population of workers whose contribution of services could significantly be improved by having more CML drillings.

Theme V: Awareness of Mobile Applications

The interviews revealed the fact that owning a smartphone does not necessarily lead to a tech-savvy life among the foreign workers. Although all of the respondents proved that they owned mobile phones when the interview took place, not all of them reported to have actively used a mobile application since moving to Malaysia. Since 2020, Malaysia has been striving to become a digital nation and more than 80% of Malaysians have access to the internet (Said,

2020) and the use of mobile applications is booming with an extremely high rates of mobile phone penetration (Yusof, 2020). Since the majority of the workers in Malaysia concentrated on low-skilled occupations (World Bank, 2020), chances for them to be at par with other professionals on the aspect of technological advancement is low. Here, it is highly encouraged for the employers to provide an in-depth induction to increase awareness on the use of mobile application among foreign workers in Malaysia. By doing so, the foreign workers are able to progress well in their respective sectors and employers will be able to reduce cost on trainings and development, given that mobile learning is way more cost-effective. Nonetheless, there are still inadequate information on how foreign use mobile to support their language learning and communication (Epp, 2017). In the context of language, most foreigner adult language learners did not take full advantage of mobile tools that have been presented to them (Epp, 2017). Thus, a support system is much needed to close this gap as learning goes beyond mobile translation services and dictionaries.

Theme VI: Awareness and Use of Mobile Applications in Learning CML

The findings consist of mixed reactions on the utilization of any available CML mobile applications. However in general, it can be said that the existence of CML-specific mobile application in Malaysia is still at the infant stage in which the popularity of its use to function as a learning assistance tool is still low among the foreign workers. Nonetheless, most of the respondents did not deny the fact that the use of the application may be able to help them to learn target language in much cheaper and flexible way.

Another notable finding is that most respondents agreed that the application should focus on more listening drills as they believe this skill is the most important skill that would shape their entire ability to communicate well with the locals. Thus, educators and instructional developers shall consider to produce mobile applications that focus on listening practice. This is not only recommended in the context of CML but rather globally since it has been empirically proven that listening skill is a crucial skill in any languages. Not only that, half of the respondents admitted that they had worked in other foreign countries before coming to Malaysia and likewise, they also learned the languages of the respective countries independently since they were not given any specific lessons nor being exposed to structured language learning. This shows, that the problem they faced in learning a foreign language is not limited to Malaysia's scope.

This brought up the idea of having a mobile learning platform that could be used at any given moment globally. This is in line with Kukulska-Hulme's (2019) views on the use of mobile technology on foreign' language learning. Kukulska-Hulme believes that there is a productive synergy between foreign' mass mobility and the language of their host society. In 2013, UNESCO established the relevance of mobile learning towards equality in education across the globe through its slogan "Education for All" (Kukulska-Hulme, 2019). Through this slogan, UNESCO has recognized the unique benefits of mobile learning to global foreign such as bridging the gap between formal and informal learning. Thus every policy makers, developers, and government entities of developing countries should consider of creating their own official language learning mobile applications and these applications can be introduced and commercialized across nations with the help of internet advancement. This could be a game-changer in globalization and would be able to close the gap between nations, minimizing miscommunication among citizens of the world as well as to reduce discrimination and racism that might have been caused by low language proficiency among newcomers.

Limitation of Study

This study is limited to small numbers of participants. This is due to respondents' lack of voluntarily participation. Initially more than 10 potential respondents were approach, but only 10 respondents were comfortable to spend their time and opinion. The rest of them declined due to extreme concern on their privacy despite being informed of the whole confidentiality of personal information. Thus, the findings of this study may not be able to generalize the CML acquisition process to the whole foreign workers population.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the transcribed interviews, it was found that listening skill is the most needed skill in CML acquisition. It can also be concluded that none of the respondents involved in this study had attended any formal lessons to acquire CML when they first arrived in Malaysia, except for those who are working as residential guards, since they were given basic CML lessons during the training and induction provided by the security companies for which they worked. The respondents also claimed that time constraints and the need to survive in a foreign country had forced them to be self-taught rather than signing up for CML courses. This demonstrates that these workers adopt a self-directed learning style, as they learn from various sources to which they have access to enable them to work and live in the local community. The findings also concluded that all of the respondents agreed that mobile applications are a good idea to help them to learn the language on the go, although half of them mentioned that they were not aware of the existence of such applications. For the other half, after they were being introduced of such applications during the interviews, three of the respondents downloaded one of the apps and soon after agreed to its usefulness. They also considered the Malay language easy to learn, without any complex structure at the conversational level, and saw the use of mobile applications as a good alternative to physical lessons, since most of the respondents reported long workings hours. While these findings assist in constructing a comprehensive understanding of the CML learning process among foreign workers, this preliminary study is limited to a small-scale sample within the perimeter of the main city of Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, future research should review this preliminary study from different aspects, such as job categories that require different levels of professionalism and formal language, as well as from the perspective of foreign workers who have signed up for formal language classes.

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Online Assessment in the Digital Era: Moroccan EFL University Students' Experiences, Perceptions and Challenges

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Abstract

After the scientific consensus on the proliferation of COVID-19, a lethal virus, educational institutions worldwide have swiftly migrated to online learning. This upheaval has propelled online evaluation and assessment to be the norm during this period. The principal objective of the study and research is to explore students' experience with online emergency learning as well as online evaluation. This paper also investigates how Moroccan English as a foreign language (EFL) university learners perceive online assessment in comparison to face-to-face assessment. Data were collected from a sample of 93 Moroccan EFL university students using a self-designed questionnaire. The findings of this research revealed that the students experienced technical issues while submitting their exams. They have also expressed their disappointment with the lack of feedback provided by their professors, not to mention their constant worry about academic honesty. This has led them to lose interest in their studies and possess doubts about reliving this dissatisfactory experience. Therefore, the results implied that participants perceive online assessment as an insignificant factor for performance improvement. This unprecedented experience has had an unadulterated negative impact on students as it has left them both dissatisfied with their experience regarding distance learning and apprehensive about their future educational experiences. It is, then, recommended that the notion of online assessment should be given much attention in higher education in the Moroccan context.

Keywords: challenges, feedback, online assessment, students' perceptions

Since the unforeseen advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments worldwide, including Morocco, have imposed severe regulations that prohibit social gatherings and galvanize self-isolation. As a strategy to prevent this virus from proliferating, several educational institutions have abruptly shuttered their doors and shifted not only to online learning but also to online assessment. The COVID-19 crisis has rapidly accelerated the digital transformation of education globally, as colleges and universities have had to make numerous changes to their teaching styles, research processes, and collaborative relationships Chan (2021). This rampant health crisis has triggered irrevocable ramifications on the educational sector and thus led to its incontrovertible exacerbation in the sense that it has reshaped the delivery and reception of knowledge and skills. Online education is not a novel issue, but COVID-19 pandemic has been a stimulant force for the adoption of online learning in education in general (Chan, Bista, & Allen, 2021). The use of the Internet as an interface between students and teachers has become tremendously ubiquitous, especially during the coronavirus pandemic. These changes have prompted educational institutions to implement several preventative measures to stop this vicious cycle from perpetuating itself, resulting in the shift from the traditional “chalk and talk” learning/assessment to remote/virtual assessment as the sole outlet that ensures the successful progression of courses. The pandemic has transcended national and regional boundaries, generations, and social classes – the many categories utilized to make sense of society. The pandemic has also served as a catastrophic reminder of the absolute necessity of higher education for knowledge generation and human well-being (Blanco, 2022).

During this period, the adoption of remote assessment/invigilation was a necessity rather than a luxury. For most Moroccan university students, this was the first time they had to take an online exam. Likewise, students were in a complete turmoil due to the lack of a supporting infrastructure. This served as an opportunity for both stakeholders and students to realize that what works well with traditional assessment is not adequate enough for a reliable online assessment experience. The online paradigm holds that learning itself may be different in the online environment and, if that is true, then the methodology for measuring it should also be different or should measure those things that are, in fact, different (Milam, Voorhees, & Bedard-Voorhees, 2004). Educational assessment is a systematic process of gauging information to extrapolate pertinent results about the accuracy of the program, students’ progress and performance, and achievement of outcomes. Assessing is a general term to describe all those activities and processes involved in judging performance (Peters et al, 1988). In the same vein, assessment has become the term of choice in education for determining the quality of student work for purposes of identifying the student’s level of achievement (Mabry, 2005).

Continuous outbreaks of new COVID-19 variants are anticipated to compel future stringent lockdowns, necessitating preparation, particularly in the educational sector. In this regard, investigating students’ perceptions and experiences with online assessment is of paramount importance to successfully deal with the unpredictability of the situation. Readiness to learn online, or E-learning, as set forth by the government is almost non-existent (Sakkir, Dollah, & Ahmad, 2021).

Hence, this paper endeavors to explore students’ experience with online emergency learning as well as online evaluation. In addition, it seeks to explore the utility and effectiveness of online assessment from a student perspective. Lastly, it sets out to investigate students’ readiness to go through the same experience in the future. Therefore, this study aims at answering the following questions:

1. How do Moroccan English as a foreign language (EFL) university students perceive online assessment?

2. How effective is online assessment from students' perspective?
3. To what extent will the Moroccan EFL university students be ready for a complete online learning experience in the future?

The use of online assessment is increasing because of multiple grounds. Despite the heavy resort to online assessment, especially during the period of COVID-19 in the Moroccan context, there is a paucity of research that investigates students' perceptions of online assessment in the educational context in general, and the effectiveness of online assessment systems or platforms in particular. This pandemic laid bare the sinister underbelly of e-assessment in education. That being the case, exploring Moroccan EFL university students' experiences and perceptions of the effectiveness of online assessment will certainly lead to fruitful implications and will decipher myriads of qualms surrounding this topic. Therefore, the findings of the research under investigation are significant as they would provide enough information about the parts of the online assessment to be given much attention due to their importance, and the parts of the systems to be improved or rectified to overcome potential challenges and to reach promising outcomes.

Literature Review

The entire globe has been in a state of emergency since late 2019 to early 2020, with face-to-face education suffering severe setbacks that have been compensated for by online learning. However, due to a multitude of factors, this abrupt shift has not been entirely successful. Two of these are the unpreparedness for taking it as the sole mode of learning and the inability to meet the conditions for fair online assessment. According to Jamiai (2021), the debate over the effectiveness and quality of online learning is also highly controversial in the sense that researchers' perspectives differ on the levels of validity and credibility of the unexpected new pedagogy adopted in Moroccan higher education. In the same vein, Neuwirth, Jović and Moukherj (2021) have stated that the real issue with e-learning is "how should faculty approach maintaining rigor and delivering quality education as well as provide support for their students' ongoing ability to engage in meaningful, interactive educational activities in the context of a crisis such as this pandemic?" (p. 42).

For the purpose of this research paper, the review of literature will be aligned with the objectives for this study. In that sense, the focus will be on online assessment, its techniques, importance, limitations, and solutions along with students' perceptions.

The Importance of Assessment

A review of previous literature reveals that there is no clear-cut definition of assessment. According to Bachman (2004), there appears to be no consensus on what assessment technically means given its multifaceted interpretations and the diversified ways in which it has been used in the field of language and educational testing. Therefore, the concept of assessment resides in the eye of the beholder. It has many definitions, so it is essential that anyone who writes or speaks about assessment defines it at the outset (Kinzie, 2015). For starters, Brown (2004) has defined assessment as any act of interpreting information about student performance, collected through a variety of means or practices. By the same token, Benson and Brack (2010) has averred that when assessment is thought of, it is often equated with examinations and assignments, as well as grading the performance of students in order to decide if they are eligible to "pass" a particular subject or part of it. In addition, Palomba and Banta (1999) have posited a more crystallized definition of assessment wherein they asserted that it is the systematic

collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development. In line with assessment, Weleschuk, Dyjur, & Kelly (2019) have suggested that online assessments can be defined as any procedure or course of action for assessing students' learning performance, providing feedback, or pushing students along in their learning process in completely online credit courses.

Given the miscellaneous definitions of assessment, it is critical to discriminate between formative and summative assessment. The former is mainly concerned with students' progress and learning process. In the same line of reasoning, Gikandi, Morrow, & Davis (2011) have defined formative assessment as:

the iterative processes of establishing what, how much and how well students are learning in relation to the learning goals and expected outcomes in order to inform tailored formative feedback and support further learning, a pedagogical strategy that is more productive when the role is shared among the teacher, peers and the individual learner. (p. 2337)

Thus, feedback of this particular type is crucial as it helps students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that require improvement. The student needs feedback in order to see deficiencies and mistakes (Senel & Senel, 2021). Moreover, given the epidemic's imposed status quo, feedback is essential to ensure interaction between faculty members and students in distance education. As Senel and Senel (2021) have contended, in the same article mentioned above, "monitoring and "feedback", which is a part of formative assessment in distance education is gaining more importance. Feedback can be considered as the primary means of student-faculty communication and interaction" (p. 182). On the other hand, the goal of a summative assessment is to compare students' learning at the end of an instructional course to a benchmark. According to Biesta (2009), summative evaluation has a directing influence as it drives the impetus to make important decisions such as passing a course, enrolling in a higher education institution, and receiving a diploma or certificate. In a similar vein, Mogboh and Okoye (2019) have stated that "summative assessment sums up what a student has achieved at the end of a period of time, relative to the learning aims and the relevant state/national standards" (p. 39). In the same breath, the authors have referred to two types of assessments: summative, which is used to grade students against a set of standards or criteria and formative, which is used for tracking students' progress.

As a result, assessment practices affect students by leading their consideration of certain aspects of module material and by stipulating how to process information (Baleni, 2015). Therefore, assessment is critically important to education both for accreditation and to support learning (Taras, 2008).

Online Assessment Methods and Techniques

Bearing in mind that neither the circumstances nor the settings of traditional and online assessment are similar, new techniques are necessarily being created to survive online assessment challenges that are likely to result in assessing desired learning outcomes with a degree of compromise. It has been suggested that a variety of assessment techniques should be employed to effectively assess student performance online (Pallof & Pratt, 2009).

Palloff and Pratt (2009, p. 41) have provided the following techniques:

- The provision of regular, ongoing communication with and feedback to students as a means by which to embed assessment in the course itself,
- The inclusion of dynamic interaction, defined by the use of group work, collaboration, and a high level of interaction through discussion,
- The modification of traditional assessment tools, such as essays, discussion question responses, and projects that require demonstration of skill acquisition and problem - solving ability, and
- The use of alternative assessments, such as performance-based assessments, authentic assessments, and the use of e-portfolios.

Palomba and Banta (1999) have bifurcated between direct and indirect assessment methods. Direct measures divulge what students have learnt. They include objective tests where students get to choose the right and wrong answers and performance measures where they produce their own content as in essays, comprehensive portfolios, and so on. On the other hand, questionnaires and interviews are examples of indirect techniques that require students to reflect on their learning instead of demonstrating it.

Students' Perceptions of Online Assessment

There is a scarcity of research scrutinizing students' perceptions of online assessment. Additionally, there exist multiple remarkable disparities in how students perceive online assessment. For some, online evaluation is favorable, and they uphold its enactment. Other views are juxtaposed to the optimistic, favorable ones; online assessment does not bode well for them. For instance, Rolim and Isaisas (2018) have demonstrated that both students and instructors positively accept the accessibility of online assessments. Likewise, Tran, Nguyen, Nguyen, & Tran (2021) have suggested that the future of e-assessment is tremendously propitious because the majority of students were enthusiastic towards its adoption during the pandemic era. Moreover, Huda, Kabir, & Siddiq (2020) have reported that learners perceive online assessment favorably; yet, they indicated that some students have conflicting feelings of comfort and apprehension. On their part, Alsalhi, Qusef, Al-Qatawneh, & Eltahir (2022) in their research have implied that the “students were in favour of online assessment as students' degree of acceptance of online assessment during the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that, from the students' own perspective, the degree of acceptance of online assessment was at a high level” (p. 23). However, they went on to say that students' perspectives towards online assessment vary according to gender, college, and academic year.

Khan and Khan (2018) have conducted a study in the United Arab Emirates where they discovered that what matters for students the most regarding online assessment is a well-planned transition. They suggested that “It is evident through this study and in literature that one of the most essential elements to the acceptance of online assessments is how the transition from traditional assessments is made” (p.673). They have also found out that students crave meaningful interactions with their instructors as well as a constructive and timely feedback. From this study, it is clear that in order to make online assessment more acceptable for students, it is important that the interaction with instructors must remain personalized, active, and meaningful. This is consistent with the results of another comparative study in the UK, South Africa, and Hungary conducted by Cranfield, Tick, Venter, Blignaut, & Renaud (2021), which demonstrated that students yearned for physical interaction and preferred face-to-face delivery of information.

Online Assessment Challenges

One of the most serious challenges in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is the unpreparedness of teachers and students to undergo online assessment. Teachers lacked familiarity with online assessment and did not have enough time to create effective online assessments as COVID-19 took them by surprise (Baciri & Sahli, 2020). While every institution of higher education likely has contingency planning for the short term, many did not have long-term continuity plans for the transition from in-person courses to an online modality (Chan et al., 2021). They have added, “The sudden transition to online coursework left some faculty members scrambling to redesign courses to follow a modality they may never have taught in” (p. 13). In addition to that, mentioning online assessment without talking about the plagiarism epidemic and cheating is futile, especially given that many higher education institutions lack online and physical security to safeguard assessments and cheating, and thus circumstances such as COVID-19 might indeed necessitate some compromise in assessing intended learning outcomes (Tuah & Naing, 2021). Finally, yet importantly, COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing disparities between students. Problems of connectivity are only the tip of the iceberg. COVID-19 restrictions have widened the digital gap across all teaching and learning spaces (due to the lack of a national response to the public health crisis), while exacerbating economic and structural inequalities with regards to ICT access (i.e., Internet, electricity, computers) among historically vulnerable populations (e.g., rural children, families of color, students with disabilities, students of refugee status) (Salmi, 2021 as cited in Chan, et al., 2021).

Previous Research/Studies

Since the sudden outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting shift to online education and assessment, numerous researchers have endeavored to demystify the multifarious angles of this issue and thus provide the basic platform for stakeholders to manage and deal with this new trend of education. Senel and Senel (2021) have conducted a study on remote assessment and discovered that rapid assessment and feedback were insufficient for effective learning. Students have also reported that online test scores do not necessarily reflect their scholastic aptitude. The same study pointed out that despite the accessibility to remote assessment, students still prefer conventional exams. In the same context, another study conducted by Montenegro-Rueda, Luque-de La Rosa, Sarasola Sánchez-Serrano, & Fernández-Cerero (2021) demonstrated that online assessment was accompanied with myriads of challenges that heavily affected both students and faculty members. These problems include a conspicuous shortage of platforms designed specifically for online assessment that lay the groundwork for academic dishonesty, connectivity issues and technical problems, and privacy issues. Concerning teachers’ perspectives, Anasse and Rhandy (2021) through their research have revealed that there is a tendency among participants to favor paper-writing assessment to online ones. This is because EFL Moroccan teachers lack prior experience with online assessment, not to mention digital illiteracy. While many pieces of research have provided diversified definitions of assessment, delved deeper into online assessment’s techniques and practices, and focused on the impact of online education on students as well as teachers, few tackled the problem of online assessment from students’ perspectives, experiences, and perceptions. Students’ experience with online assessment is very important to improve the educational process since they play an important role in the learning process so does their experiences with certain learning processes.

Method and Methodology

This section will describe and discuss in detail the research design and methodology used in this study, as well as the population, the sample, and the geographical areas where the study was conducted. It also examines the data collection instrument and the data analysis procedures. The research under study adopted an exploratory research design as it sought to explore several issues regarding online assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely students' perceptions of online assessment, its effectiveness, and challenges.

This study targeted Moroccan EFL university students. Therefore, the participants of this study were ninety-three (N= 93) Moroccan EFL university students, namely from Moulay Ismail University, Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) Meknes, and Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra. The participants were second-year students (Semester 3) and third-year university students (Semester 5). The sample was composed of males and females aged between 18 and 24. This study was conducted using a quantitative method manifested by a questionnaire as a data collection instrument (Creswell, 2014). Based on a thorough review of the literature and based on the objectives of the study, a questionnaire (Schommer & Walker, 1995) was designed, reviewed, and then circulated online via various platforms, primarily Gmail and WhatsApp, to undergraduate students to complete (Creswell, 2012). Data collection took place during the eleventh month of 2021. The sampling method was of a convenient/purposive nature. For the data analysis procedure, it was planned to use the SPSS version 19 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), but because of the nature of online questionnaires, the analysis of the results was generated automatically which were mainly descriptive statistics.

Data Analysis

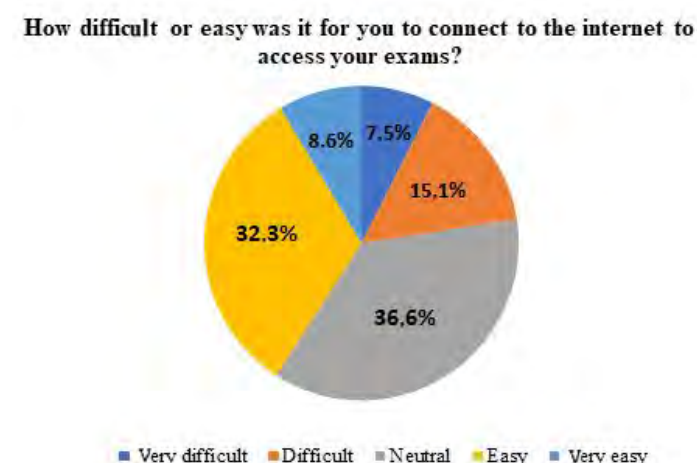
The aim of this section is to analyze and interpret the collected data from the online survey questionnaire that was administered to the ninety-three Moroccan EFL university students attending numerous institutions. Generally, the overall analysis of the obtained data is carried out in accordance with the research questions of this study and in alignment with the survey questions. More precisely, the quantitative data, represented by the questionnaire, described the overall tendency of the informants.

Students' Readiness and Perceptions of Online Assessment (RQ1)

Students' readiness and motivation for online assessment would truly aid in building a mental model of how they perceive the experience and would definitely identify the success and utility of online assessment. Hence, the students were provided with closed-ended questions, and they were asked to respond to how ready they were for taking online exams. As reported in the figure below, the majority of the respondents (72%) claimed to be unready and had no intention to sit for online exams. Nevertheless, 28% of the informants indicated that they were ready for such experience.

Figure 1*Students' Readiness for Accessing Remote Assessment*

The ease or difficulty of Internet access is a significant factor in measuring not only the success of online learning but also online evaluation as it unquestionably enhances the students' access to their tests remotely. Accordingly, the results, as shown in Figure 2, revealed that more than one-third of participants (36.6%) stated their uncertainty and neutrality regarding the ease of accessing the Internet or difficulty of accessing their exams online. However, almost half of the informants claimed that it was either easy (32.3%) or very easy (7.5%) for them to access their exams using the online model. On the other hand, a lesser amount of them revealed that it was either difficult (15.1%) or very difficult (8.6%).

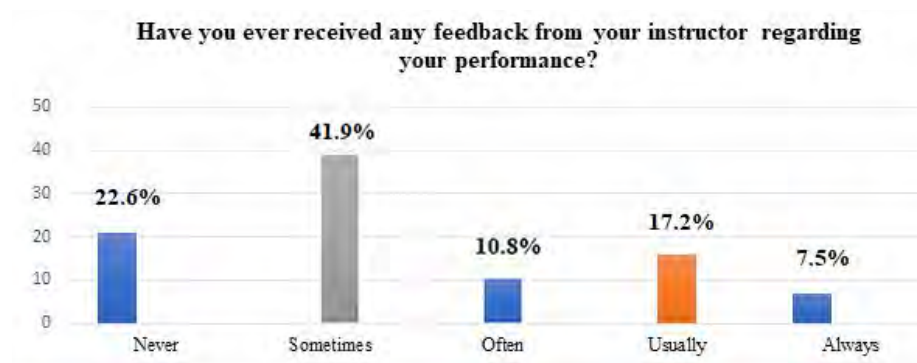
Figure 2*Difficulty in terms of Internet for Accessing Exams Online*

Giving and receiving feedback is commonly regarded as a form of assessment employed to improve students' performance. In this respect, the informants were required to respond to a five-point scale (1= always, 2= usually, 3= often, 4= sometimes, 5= never) concerning receiving online feedback as far as their performance was concerned. The obtained results, as illustrated in Figure 3, suggested that the majority of the participants (41.9%) claimed that they sometimes received feedback, some of them (17.2%) usually received feedback, a minority (10.8%) often

received feedback and the smallest number of participants (7.5%) revealed that they always received feedback. Several respondents (22.6%) declared that they received no feedback.

Figure 3

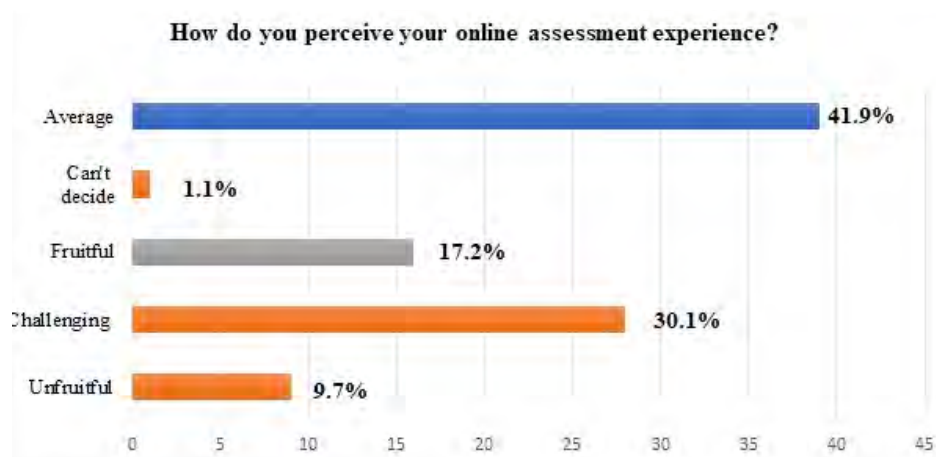
Instructors' Feedback to Students' Online Performance



In this study, students' perceptions were issued as a focal point of the investigation. As a result, learning about the participants' perspectives on online assessment was vital. The obtained data demonstrated that the majority of the respondents (41.9%) perceived their experience with remote online assessment as insignificant or average. Moreover, several informants described this experience as either challenging (30.1%) or unfruitful (9.7%). However, some respondents agreed that this online evaluation experience was fruitful (17.2%). Overall, the number of informants who expressed a degree of dissatisfaction with the online assessment experience was close to the same number that considered the feedback insignificant.

Figure 4

Students' Perceptions of their Online Assessment Experience



The Effectiveness of Online Assessment (RQ2)

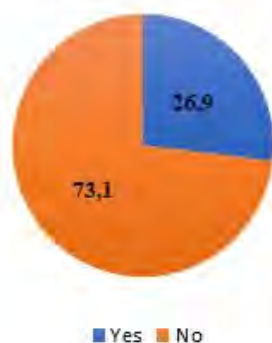
Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, students had only been exposed to traditional onsite evaluation throughout their scholastic careers. Therefore, gaining an insight into the effectiveness of online assessment from a student perspective was at the core of the present study. For this reason, students were required to respond to a yes-no question regarding the effectiveness of online assessment in comparison to a traditional face-to-face assessment. The

obtained results implied that 73.1% of the respondents believed that online assessment is not effective when compared to a traditional face-to-face assessment. Conversely, 26.9% of the informants thought that online assessment could be as effective as onsite assessment.

Figure 5

Belief in Online Effectiveness for Assessment

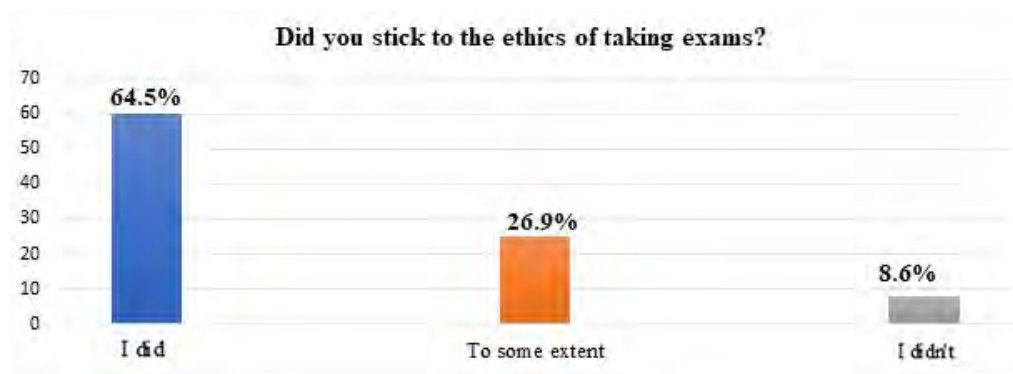
Do you believe online assessment is as effective as traditional assessment?



Concerning assessment challenges and pitfalls, students were required to respond to whether they adhered to the ethics of taking exams or not. Accordingly, the survey data, as shown in Figure 6, revealed that the vast majority (64.5%) adhered to exam-taking ethics, while 26.9% stated that they did, albeit only to some extent. Nonetheless, a minority admitted not respecting the principles of taking exams as they resorted to cheating.

Figure 6

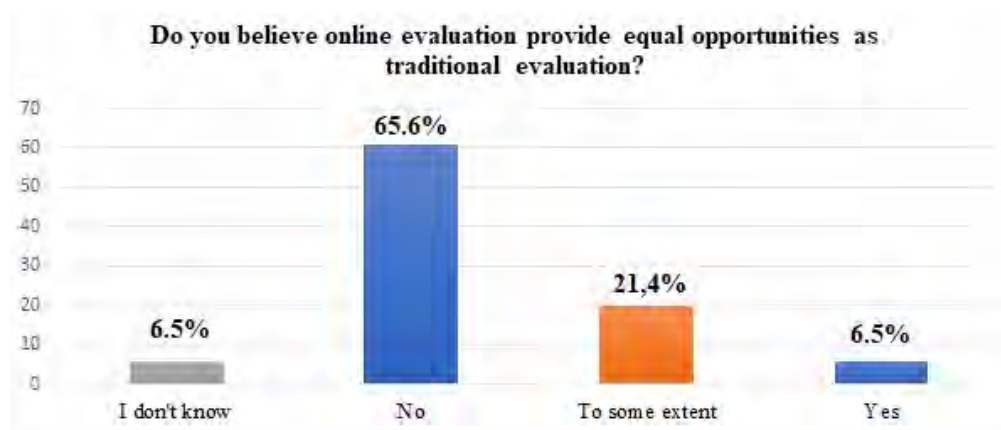
Did Student Stick to Proper Exam Taking Ethics



One of the biggest concerns of online assessment was the inequality among test takers. It was evident from the students' responses that the majority of them (65.6%) claimed that online assessment did not provide equal opportunities as traditional assessment; 21.4% of the informants believed it did to some extent. However, 6.5% of the subjects were uncertain about whether the chances offered by the online assessment were similar to those offered by face-to-face assessment.

Figure 7

Students’ Beliefs: Online Assessment Provides Equal Opportunities as Face-to-Face Assessment



Students’ Readiness for an Entire Online Learning and Assessment Experience (RQ3)

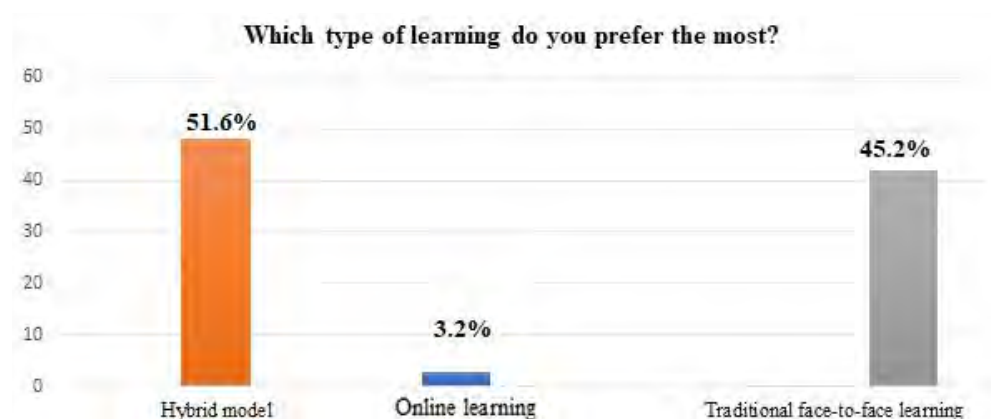
Doubtless, students’ readiness to experiment with something new or go through a similar experience determines its success or failure. This might also lead one to learn about the students’ perceptions regarding online assessment. In accordance with this, the informants were to state if they were open to the same online assessment experience in the future. The results illustrated that most of the respondents were either uncertain (38.7%) or not ready (35.5%) anew for such an experience. However, some participants revealed their readiness for the same online assessment experience in the future.

Figure 8

Students’ Readiness for the Same Online Assessment Experience in the Future



Gaining insights into students’ learning preferences unequivocally entails how they perceive the issue of remote assessment. For this purpose, students were to highlight their preferred learning mode. The participants’ replies demonstrated their tendency towards hybrid and traditional learning modes. To illustrate, more than half of the informants (51.6%) chose the hybrid mode as their preference, whereas 45.2% of them opted for the choice of a traditional face-to-face learning mode. Still, only a minority (3.2%) preferred the online learning option.

Figure 9*Preferred Learning and Assessment Modes***Online Assessment Challenges, Drawbacks, and Advantages*****Online Assessment Challenges***

One of the primary objectives of this study was to unveil the challenges Moroccan EFL university students faced while sitting for their very first online assessment. In fact, the survey findings revealed that online assessment created numerous hurdles for students, including work overload, increased stress, connectivity issues, and technical problems. The following are examples of what most students stated regarding online assessment challenges:

- “Difficulties in having clear conversations with professors regarding problems and instructions”
- “Time shortage, technical problems, weak bandwidth”
- “Time management”
- “Blockage of the website in which students had to submit their documents”
- “Enormous amount of stress”
- “Due to Internet issues, I could not download some exams on the spot”
- “Internet connection issues”

Online Assessment Drawbacks

This study not only investigated online assessment challenges encountered by students, but it has also aimed at deciphering the shortcomings hovering around this experience. Along with the aforementioned challenges, students in a response to online assessment drawbacks asserted that academic dishonesty was the most feared side effect of online assessment. Examples of such comments include:

- “It allows students to cheat without being caught”
- “Academic dishonesty will always be one the cardinal problems in online assessment”
- “Inequality: some do breach the ethics of exam taking”
- “It did not demonstrate the real level of students since most of them cheated to some extent”
- “Constant troubleshooting of technical problems along with cheating which leads to an utter inequality in grades”
- “The school not being ready for this kind of assessments”

Online Assessment Advantages

This study also sought to determine whether students associate any positive characteristics with online assessment. Though the results point to the majority of participants believing there is no advantage to online assessments, a minority believe that online assessments adapt to diverse learning styles and requirements. These advantages include:

“Flexibility and lack of peer distraction”

“Online assessment has enables me to work comfortably and thereby produce satisfactory outcomes since I have the proclivity to study alone in a distraction-free, hassle-free environment”

“It encourages autonomous learning”

“I had the opportunity to listen to music while taking the exam”

“It provides feedback about one’s progress”

Discussion and Conclusion

This study focused on exploring Moroccan EFL learners’ experiences, perceptions, and challenges with online assessment. A number of noteworthy inferences can be made from the data, as represented in the figures in the Data Analysis section and based on the interpretations of the results. Additionally, having obtained data from the sample leads to robust findings and insights that could possibly be generalizable.

Generally, as reported in Figure 1, the findings reveal students’ lack of readiness to online assessment. Such status may be related to students’ unfamiliarity with online learning, or due to their lack of experience. Simply put, online assessment was not a choice, but it was imposed on the learners owing to the spread of COVID-19. Furthermore, the research’s findings, in response to RQ 1, imply that online assessment has been perceived as insignificant, challenging and unfruitful. This is clearly demonstrated by the percentages and scores (See figures 1 & 4). Students’ lack of readiness and the negative perceptions they hold towards online assessment is heightened by the inconsistency of the feedback they receive from their instructors. Not surprisingly, the participants reveal their reluctance to go through the same experience anew in the future even though they experienced online assessment. They also stick to the traditional conventions of assessment (See Figures 8 & 9). Therefore, it is difficult for learning to take place in online conditions since the students viewed the experience with dubious confidence in its success. The findings are consistent with those of Senel and Senel (2021). The findings also align with Anasse and Rhandy’s (2021) research on teachers’ attitudes towards online assessment as the same factors are applicable to teachers.

Additionally, in response to RQ 2, the findings from the informants’ responses, reveal interesting outcomes concerning the effectiveness of online assessment. Apparently, from the findings of the questionnaire (Figure 5) the majority of participants tend to believe that online assessment is not as effective as face-to-face assessment. Its ineffectiveness stems from the unequal opportunities, as demonstrated by the results (Figure 7), it offers regarding students’ performance. This is due to the drawbacks online assessment entails, including cheating. With respect to this, the findings of this research corroborate with other researchers’ findings (Khan & Khan, 2018; Jamiai, 2021).

As for students’ readiness for a complete online learning experience in the future (RQ 3), the current study’s findings, as shown in Figure 8, reveal that respondents were reluctant to relive the same online assessment experience in the future. This is also justified by the choice of the

learning mode learners opted for in their replies. More importantly, students' own answers regarding the challenges and drawbacks of remote assessment reveal much to consider. These challenges include work overload, increased stress, connectivity issues, and technical problems. The drawbacks revolve around academic dishonesty. With regard to previous research findings concerning online assessment challenges and drawbacks, the findings of this study are consistent with those of other researchers such as Chan et al. (2021) who have extrapolated that online learning has engendered myriad stumbling blocks for students in low- and middle-income countries, with many expressing concerns that learners are unable to access the Internet due to poverty and destitution, Benson and Brack (2010) who linked challenges to submission of items (connectivity, size, print paper preference), automated assessment, online discussion for assessment, and Rogers (2006) who listed some challenges of online assessment which revolve around mechanics of assessment and the prevention of digital cheating.

Limitations and Recommendations

It stands to reason that no research can be carried out without encountering some obstacles and shortcomings. The present research has confronted many limitations, which made it difficult but not impossible. First, the findings of this study may not be widely generalizable. However, any findings from any research are generalizable only within that situation and within the context of the work, which is declared in advance. Second, the sampling population is not large enough (93 Moroccan EFL university students) to make the study more representative on a large scale. It is also possible that the adoption of another sampling technique apart from the one used in this study could yield better outcomes. Third, the methodology implemented in this research study has limitations resulting from the innate nature of the data collection instruments. Moreover, students' perceptions and attitudes are subject to change over time. There is also a shortage of references and studies dealing with online assessment from a student perspective.

Based on the findings of the quantitative study derived from the collected data, the following implications and recommendations are made for integrating online assessment and conducting additional study. Consequently, it is required that policy makers, stakeholders, and decision makers rethink the process of assessing learners online. Secondly, educational institutions should provide platforms specifically designed for online assessment. Thirdly, both teachers and students should be trained on how to use a given online assessment platform. Finally, teachers must provide students with clear instructions regarding any online assessment. Therefore, it is recommended that future research should focus on online assessment from teachers' perspectives. In addition to that, researchers should investigate students' perceptions, experiences, and challenges with online assessment from a larger scale. Lastly, more investigation is required to assess other effects of these assessments on long-term knowledge retention.

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